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Magical Powers
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Sacrificed Itself
to Stop the Plague

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with Charms, Traps,
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Ancient Magic

+ *Merlin the Magician*
Was he a real historical figure?

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Think of the word 'magic', and it may conjure up images of wands, witches, or the wizarding world of Harry Potter. But in ancient times, magic wasn't about an awesome display of fantastical feats. It was a way for people to make sense of and take control their lives. Magic, overlapping with notions of science, medicine, and religion, was a resource for navigating an uncertain world.

It was everywhere – magic was a source of protection, a means for healing, a way to enact justice, a method for predicting and controlling future events, and a practice to farewell the dead and ensure their safe onwards journey. From birth until death, magic permeated all aspects of life and was called upon to accomplish things beyond the scope of human abilities.

In this edition, we illuminate the ancient and medieval world of magic – mythological tales of the Tengu, mischievous tricksters of Japanese legend; Middle Eastern folktales of magical flying carpets, made famous by Walt Disney's *Aladdin*; and magic rings of power that have made numerous appearances throughout history. Did an Ancient Egyptian ring protect archaeologist Howard Carter from the mummy's curse, when many others were struck down?

But where does superstition end and reality begin? Did Merlin the Magician, the famous wizard of King Arthur's court, really exist? And is there any truth to the bizarre accounts of Icelandic 'necropants' made from the skin of a dead man?

Whilst some tales may be closer to fiction than fact, expert contributor Brian Hoggard reveals solid archaeological evidence for the mysterious and eerie rituals for magical house protection, including witch-bottles, concealed shoes, horse skulls, and even dried cats!

An issue on magic wouldn't be complete without a spotlight on John Dee, the Master of Magic himself, occult magician and astrologer of the English Royal Court, nor without delving into the dark and frightening world of grimoires and the dangers of dark magic.

But welcome to your 'Defence Against the Dark Arts' class; we've included some healing herbs and spells that the ancients relied upon to combat dark forces. Enjoy this magical issue! ■

Joanna Gillan
Chief Editor, Ancient Origins Magazine

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE...

Brian Hoggard

Brian Hoggard is an independent researcher who has been specializing in the archaeology of folk magic for more than 20 years. He is the author of *Magical House Protection: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft*.

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Graham Phillips is a British author who has investigated historical mysteries for over three decades. His 15 published books include investigations into the truth behind King Arthur, Merlin, and the search for the Holy Grail.

Ashley Cowie

Ashley Cowie is a Scottish historian, author, and documentary filmmaker. His historical documentaries have been viewed by an estimated 200 million people.

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Archaeonews

ll By Micki Pistorius

Ancient Egyptian Sarcophagus Reveals Mummy Secrets

Unique paintings of the ancient Egyptian goddess Amentet was discovered on the 3,000-year-old sarcophagus of the famous mummy of 'Ta-Kr-Hb', probably either a princess or priestess, from Thebes.

The discovery comes after Ta-Kr-Hb was lifted from her death bed for a check-up at the Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, which included X-rays, showing she suffered extensive damage to the chest and pelvis. Radiography scans also revealed that transnasal excerebration surgery had been performed, to remove the brain mass through her sinuses.

Dr. Mark Hall, of the Perth Museum and Art Gallery, said the team was surprised to find paintings of the Egyptian goddess Amentet, (She of the West), inside and outside the sarcophagus trough. In mythology the 'goddess of the deceased', lived in a tree facing the entrance to the Underworld to the west where the sun set, offering food to the dead spirits traveling to the "field of reeds".

Ritual Site Dedicated to Mesopotamian War God Discovered

In the 5,000-year-old sacred district called Uruku, of the ancient Sumerian town of Girsu, (Iraq) archaeologists uncovered a temple of the war god, Ningirsu, son of Enlil, chief deity of Mesopotamia. Spy satellite images and modern drones were used to create digital maps of the temple and surrounding area and a virtual reconstruction enabled archaeologists to excavate the location more systematically. Some walls were decorated with cones inscribed with magical spells.

The archaeologists of the Tello Ancient Girsu Project found 300 artifacts such as cups, bowls, and vessels, which were used in ceremonies. Also found was a vase fragment, bearing the name Ningirsu. Director of the project, Sebastian Rey said that the artifacts were ritually discarded in the *'favissa'* or ritual pit. Also recovered from the pit were bones from wild and domesticated animals. Tina Greenfield, a zooarchaeologist, reported that these animals had most likely been sacrificed and possibly consumed at ritual feasts.

The researchers believe that the cultic area was in use during the Early Dynastic period (2950 - 2350 BC). According to cuneiform texts and clay tablets, the population of Girsu gathered to feast and participate in a religious procession in honor of Ningirsu.

Dr. Colleen Morgan/CC BY 2.0

Remains uncovered at Çatalhöyük

Ancient Dead Found Buried in Their Homes In Çatalhöyük

Between 7500 and 5700 BC, Çatalhöyük was an important Neolithic and Chalcolithic proto-city settlement southeast of present-day Konya (ancient Iconium) Turkey. Assistant professor Katarzyna Harabasz, from the University of Szczecin, confirmed that some of the residents may have been buried inside their own homes in shallow graves covered with plaster. Some of the graves had been reopened to remove body parts to make room for new corpses.

Previously, researchers were aware that people had been buried in houses in the city, but the mystery of whether the residents were buried in their own homes, or with larger numbers of people remained unsolved.

In one of the houses, Harabasz discovered the bones of an elderly woman covered with organic soot. This suggests she had inhaled hearth fumes, which had caused chronic obstructive pulmonary disease that may have led to changes in her lung tissue, resulting in respiratory failure. Harabasz noted that the hearth was located in an area inside the home without ventilation. This would have depreciated the air quality, indicating the woman was buried in her own home. ■

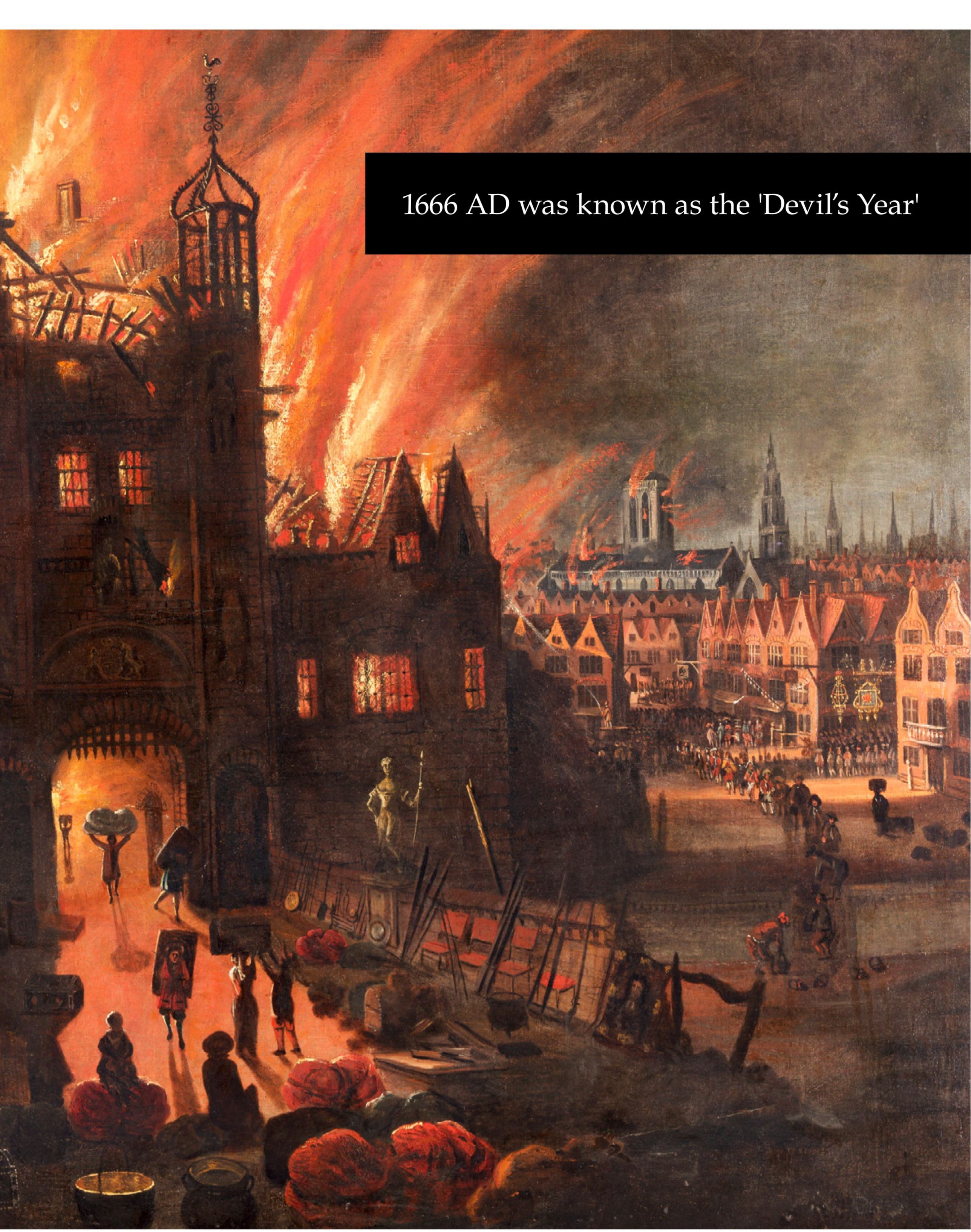
Eyam's Ultimate Sacrifice

The Medieval Village that Locked Down to Stop the Plague

|| By Ashley Cowie

Lockdown is a word we now see on a daily basis as the 2020 coronavirus pandemic requires limiting the movements and activities of communities during the mass quarantine of most of the world's population. But this is not the first time such drastic social measures have been taken.

1666 AD was known as the "Devil's Year" for much more than its numerical association with the number of the Biblical Beast, but no sooner had the diabolical date begun, when on January 26 France declared war on England and Munster against a backdrop of "Black Death" (bubonic plague) that decimated the population between 1665 - 1666. According to historian Ben Johnstone, in September 1666, when the Great Fire of London swept through central parts of the English city it destroyed the pulsing heart of religion in England, St Paul's Cathedral, and a further 87 parish churches and 13,200 houses. When the smoke cleared and the human death toll was found to be the number "six," many Londoners believed that the lord of darkness did indeed walk among them.



The Great Fire of London, with Ludgate and Old St. Paul's, painting circa 1670

1666

BLACK DEATH TROTTING ON 'THE DEVIL'S HOOF'

The Great Plague lasted from the beginning of 1665 until September 1666, representing the last major epidemic of the bubonic plague to occur in England, killing an estimated 200,000 (one-quarter of London's population). Fatalities soared in the city of London in part because Londoners failed to self-quarantine, but this was not the case in the rural English village of Eyam located idyllically in the Derbyshire Dales within the Peak District National Park.

Fearing Black Death might penetrate their quaint community, the entire population of around 350, mostly farming folk, quarantined themselves. A 2004 paper titled *The Eyam Plague Revisited: Did the Village Isolation Change Transmission from Fleas to Pulmonary?* published in the journal *Medical Hypotheses* called it an act of "self-sacrifice" to prevent the further spread of the plague.

Following the devil's footprints backwards, this story began in the Spring of 1665 when a London fabric merchant sent a bale of cloth infected with plague-carrying fleas, that had already killed thousands of Londoners, from the capital city to Eyam. This biological time bomb was received by a

Fearing Black Death might penetrate their quaint community, the entire population quarantined themselves

tailor's assistant called George Viccars who hung it in front of his fire to dry, releasing a hell-driven fleet of disease-ridden fleas. He became the first of Eyam plague victims. What is perhaps most disturbing in this man's death, according to Eyam churchwarden Joan Plant, is that Viccars was only visiting Eyam to "help make clothes for the local religious festival, Wakes Week, but sadly he never left."

MASTER PLAN OF THE REVEREND PLAGUE FIGHTERS

By the end of the Spring of 1666, 42 villagers had died, and many were on the verge of evacuating in a last gasp to save themselves, but the newly appointed village rector, William Mompesson, was determined to prevent the plague spreading to the nearby towns of Sheffield and Bakewell and foresaw that the village should be quarantined. This would mean his parishioners would effectively have to sacrifice their lives. Mompesson became the reverend in Eyam in April 1664 after the previous rector, Thomas Stanley, had refused to acknowledge the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which was a rule that all prayers must use the *English Book of Common Prayer* introduced by Charles II. What's more, this new Act meant everyone had to attend church once a week "or be fined 12 pence," which was an impossible demand for the poor majority of England who worked seven days a week to barely scratch a subsistence.

Ken Thompson is the historian and chairman of Eyam Museum, who says neither Stanley or Mompesson were very popular in the village so their master plan to mass quarantine the village was difficult to implement and required extreme action. On June 24, 1666, Mompesson announced to his congregation that he believed the entire village should be locked down and that no-one whatsoever should be permitted to enter or leave.

Image: 'Dance of Death' from the Nuremberg Chronicle, by Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514)

Mompesson promised the villagers that if they willingly gambled with death rather than spreading the disease to other regions, that he would do everything in his power to alleviate their suffering and that the kind Earl of Devonshire based in the neighboring Chatsworth House would send them food and supplies.

Stanley agreed to support Mompesson's audacious plan and when he explained to the villagers that a one-mile guarded line preventing anyone from entering or leaving the infected area, a "cordon sanitaire", was the "only" way they could contain the plague, they eventually agreed to the daring plan. The villagers knew they had a chance of survival if they adhered to strict social distancing within the village and to prevent their disease spreading outwards, they ventured, one by one, to a boundary stone with six holes drilled in it's top. The holes were filled with a disinfecting vinegar, and there they dropped coins to pay their neighbors and traders for essential supplies.

A BBC Local Legends article published on April 12, 2007 titled *Living With The Plague* recounts the last days in what must have been a living nightmare, where for over 14 months, a settlement that had been founded and named by Anglo-Saxons slowly rotted into history, from the inside out. On November 1, 1666, farmer Abraham Morten became the 260th and last person to die from bubonic plague in Eyam, but if they had not quarantined, thousands of further deaths may have occurred across England through the national trading network, which makes the villagers' selfless decision to quarantine themselves one of history's more heroic displays of genuine altruism.

Alan Fleming/CC BY SA 2.0

Opposite, top: Portrait of William Mompesson.

Opposite, below: Eyam Parish Church contains displays and detailed accounts of the village when it voluntarily locked down during the spread of the Great Plague through flea-infested cloth from London.

Below: The Boundary Stone, Eyam, Derbyshire, with holes believed to be where coins were placed for trade during the quarantine of the Bubonic Plague outbreak of 1665-6.

Emmott Syddall was 22 and about to marry her lover, Rowland Torre, when the plague broke out. They were separated by Eyam's self-imposed quarantine. Each day, the two lovers met on opposite sides of Eyam's stream to see each other. Sadly, Emmott died from the plague. When she didn't show up at the stream after a number of days, Rowland ran into the deadly village to search for his lover. Tragically, he found the body of Emmott with her family in her home.

Excerpt from *Lockdown* by Simon Armitage

And I couldn't escape the waking dream
of infected fleas

in the warp and weft of soggy cloth
by the tailor's hearth

in ye olde Eyam.
Then couldn't un-see

the Boundary Stone,
that cock-eyed dice with its six dark holes,

thimbles brimming with vinegar wine
purging the plagued coins.

Which brought to mind the sorry story
of Emmott Syddall and Rowland Torre,

star-crossed lovers on either side
of the quarantine line

whose wordless courtship spanned the river
till she came no longer.

By the end of the devil's sweep, the outbreak of the Black Death claimed the lives of 260 of the 350 original villagers. However, their personal sacrifice successfully contained the Black Death from spreading beyond their village.

Their personal sacrifice successfully contained the Black Death from spreading beyond their village

This incredible show of social unity where a group of humans used distance as a weapon against the spread of a deadly infection, was the master plan of Reverends Stanley and Mompesson, but kudos must be equally shared among the village folk who implemented this bold act of self-sacrifice.

The people of Eyam's collective response to the disease outbreak ensured those living beyond Eyam did not suffer from the same effects of the plague that took the lives of their family and friends, and William Mompesson must be one of England's most courageous and compassionate historical figures for having dealt with distress and deaths of those inside the village, while protecting those around it. If you look again at his portrait, there is a solemnity in his eyes reflecting deep genuine compassion, a look that is today present in the faces of health staff around the world who attempt to lock down wards and hospitals in the fight to contain coronavirus, just like the villagers at Eyam did in the "Devil's Year". ■

An early nineteenth-century scene of Eyam village

HISTORY

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Borgund Stave Church

A stave church is a wooden Christian church building that was common in north-western Europe in the Middle Ages. Borgund Stave Church was a parish church in Vestland county, Norway, from around 1180 until 1868, when it was closed and turned into a museum. It is classified as a triple-nave stave church of the Sogn-type. Its walls are formed by vertical wooden boards, or staves, hence the name “stave church.” The load-bearing, ore-pine posts are called *stafr* in Old Norse and *stav* in modern Norwegian. Borgund is built on a basilica plan and the floor plan of this church resembles that of a double-shelled Greek cross with an apse attached to one end in place of the fourth arm. It is believed about 2,000 of these wooden structure churches were built in Norway between 1150 to 1350, of which only 28 remain.

THE SEDUCTIVE SCANDINAVIAN HULDRA

CHARLES CHRISTIAN

Charles Christian is a barrister and Reuters correspondent turned writer, award-winning tech journalist, radio presenter, podcaster, blogger, storyteller, and sometime werewolf-hunter who presents a weekly podcast: the Weird Tales Radio Show

Following the sheer Lovecraftian horror of last month's creature, the Nuckelavee, this month I've opted to look at a far pleasanter 'fabulous' creature: the Huldra (or Hulder).

This is an elemental who dwells among the forests, lakes, and wild places of Scandinavia, particularly Norway, Sweden, and Finland but, curiously, the Huldra are always female. And, before I go any further, I need to point out that the Huldra should not be confused with what the people of Iceland call the *huldufolk* – or Hidden People – which is their term for the Fae or fairies and elves.

The Huldra are described as being stunningly beautiful women but with one unusual physical feature: they have the long tail of either a cow or a fox. (In the far north of Sweden and over the border into Finland, in the lands of the Sámi people, the Huldra are sometimes described as being without tails but having a back that is either hollow or made of tree bark.)

Like many elementals, the Huldra can be kind and generous to humans if people treat them with respect. There's an old Swedish folktale that demonstrates this character trait:

One day a boy went fishing but he had no luck. Then he met a beautiful woman but realized she was Huldra because he could see a fox's tail sticking out below her long skirt. As he knew it was forbidden to comment on a Huldra's tail unless it was done in the most polite manner, he bowed his head before her and said in a soft voice: "Milady, I see that your petticoat shows below your skirt". The woman thanked him gracefully and hid her tail back under her skirt, then told the boy to fish on the other side of the lake. For the rest of the day, the boy had great luck with his fishing and caught a fish every time he threw out the line. This was the Huldra's reward for his politeness.

Inevitably, there is a darker, sexual side to these fabulous creatures. In some Scandinavian traditions, the Huldra lure men into the forest to have sex, rewarding those who satisfy them but killing those who do not. Other traditions say they merely kidnap men or lure them into the Otherworld, in

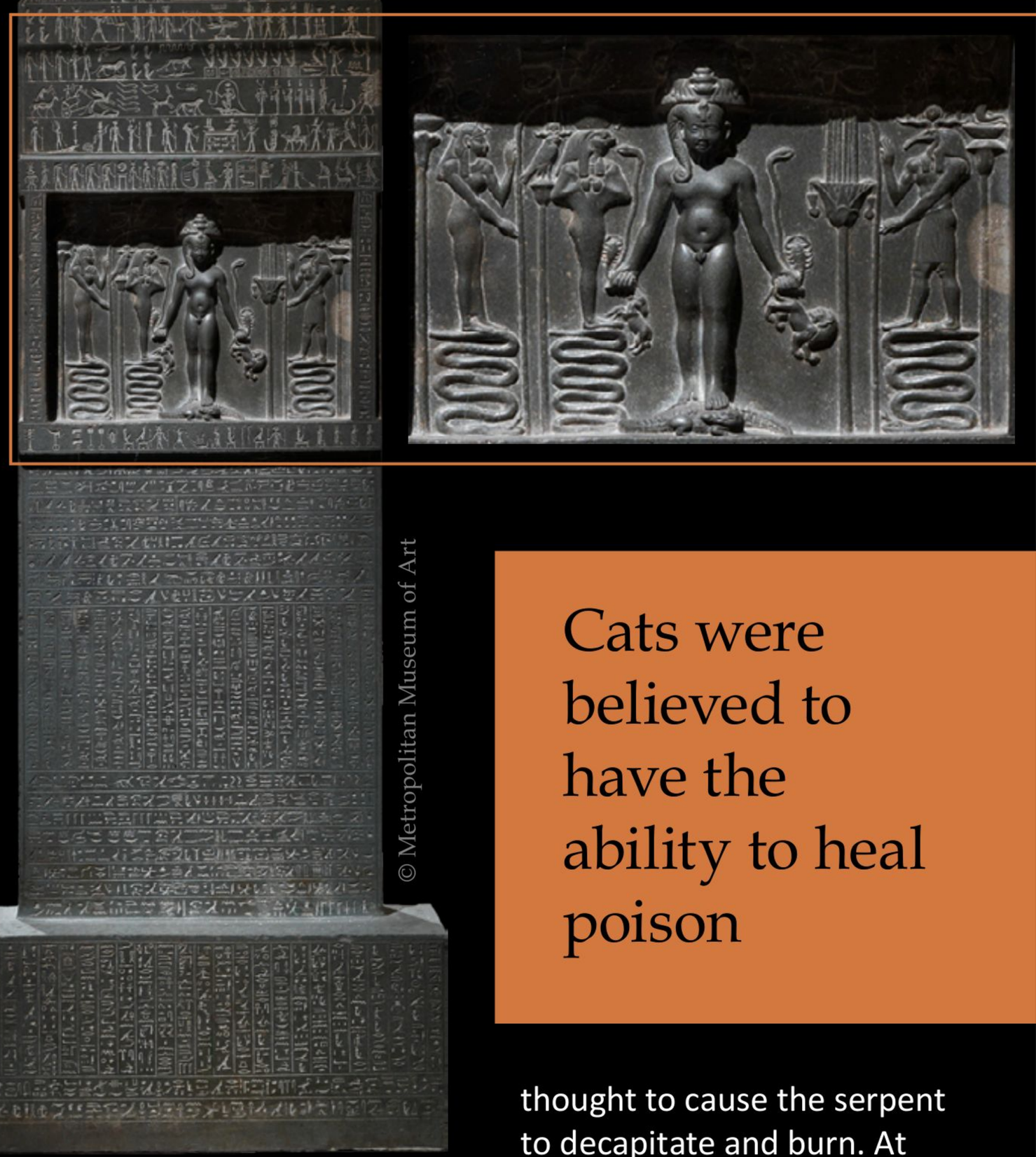
much the same way that the Fae do with mortals of either gender.

In some instances, the sexual relations may result in a child being born or even lead to the happy couple getting married. It is even said that if a Huldra marries a Christian man in a church, she will lose her tail but not her looks. And, as recently as 1980, a man was interviewed on Norwegian radio claiming he once had a child by a Huldra.

Finally, as is frequently the result of relationships between humans and elementals, woe betide anyone who betrays or badly treats a Huldra. It is said they are immensely strong and capable, for example, of straightening a horseshoe with their bare hands. Another folktale tells of a farmer's son who broke a promise to his Huldra bride and, as a consequence, was punished by her beating him so severely around the head with her cow's tail that 'he lost his hearing and his wits' for the remainder of his life! ■

The Magic and Medicine of the Metternich Stela

|| By Natalia Klimczak



© Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metternich stela is one of the most remarkable stelae related to magic and medicine in ancient Egypt. The text carved in the stone from the 30th dynasty is a fascinating source of forgotten spells and provides solutions to many health problems – especially those linked to poisoning.

It is known that the Metternich stela was created during the reign of Nectanebo II (360 – 342 BC), the last native pharaoh of Egypt, however other details related to the origins of the artifact remain unknown. It is a part of a group of stelae known as "Cippus of Horus"- a collection of stelae used to protect people from dangers like snake and crocodile attacks. However, this particular stela is one of the largest of its kind, measuring 35 inches in height. It also has some of the best-preserved magical texts of its era.

The stela, which now resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has magical recipes to heal poisons, primarily animal venom. Ancient Egyptian physicians would pour water over the stela and collect it to give it to a person who had been poisoned.

The spells discuss different animals, but they especially focus on cats and reptiles. Cats were believed to be animals of gods and goddesses, so they were thought to have the ability to heal poison. The spell against reptile poison was connected to the serpent demon Apophis and was thought to cause the serpent to decapitate and burn. At that point, the sick person would also vomit - relieving him or herself of the poison. The stela also describes some stories related to deities. In fact, most of the text is dedicated to the story of Horus—who was poisoned but cured.

> Cats were believed to have the ability to heal poison

Some people still believe that ancient Egyptian magic is powerful and that texts like those on the Metternich stela represent much more than a religious ritual. Magical texts and ancient rituals were often also a part of medical treatments in the ancient world. For the ancients, medicine was thought to be reinforced by magical powers. ■

Spotlight

Ancient Magic

John Dee

Occult Magician of the English Royal Court

By Riley Winters

Born into the era of intellectual and artistic reawakening, John Dee quickly rose through Elizabethan society as a scholar, philosopher, navigator, doctor, and astrologer of the Queen of England. Intrigued with so many fields, including a deep fascination with the occult, John Dee's vast interests resulted in his unintentional creation of the largest personal library in Elizabethan England at the time, visited by renowned scholars from all over the world. Luckily for modern historians, Dee was a prolific enough writer that his life is well documented, however, the question of why he was tasked with so many important roles in the British court is still an incredible dilemma.

Though Dee wore many hats during his lifetime, he made astounding waves in each field. He was a skilled student at St. John's College, so much so that after obtaining both a bachelor's degree and a master's from the university, Dee set his sights on working directly in the Royal Court under Queen Mary I.

His relationship with the royal court, however, turned tumultuous as he became more interested in mathematics and astrology. Queen Mary I had him arrested in 1555 for "calculating", as mathematics and magic were considered close cousins in this time. The charges were of treason and he was imprisoned for a period until finally exonerated by Bishop Edmund Bonner.

Dee

Dee rose once again in the favor of the court when Elizabeth I became queen in 1558—three years after Dee's arrest. She took him on as her astrological advisor, allowing him the prestigious task of choosing the exact date of her coronation. After, he was given numerous important court duties, such as aiding in Elizabeth's exploration ambitions.

Rarely discussed in references of the New World, Dee actually helped pioneer the voyages of exploration England took on in the 16th century, aiding the various ship captains in their mathematical techniques of navigation. It was he who provided the instruments used to navigate the waters, himself being somewhat of a professional in the art of navigation. Driven by a mutual desire to re-establish the great British Empire, Dee and Queen Elizabeth I worked tirelessly in the exploration of North America. But by 1583, he had given up his work as a navigation specialist and chose instead to focus on his research into the forces of nature and the supernatural forces of the universe.

THE LANGUAGE OF ANGELS

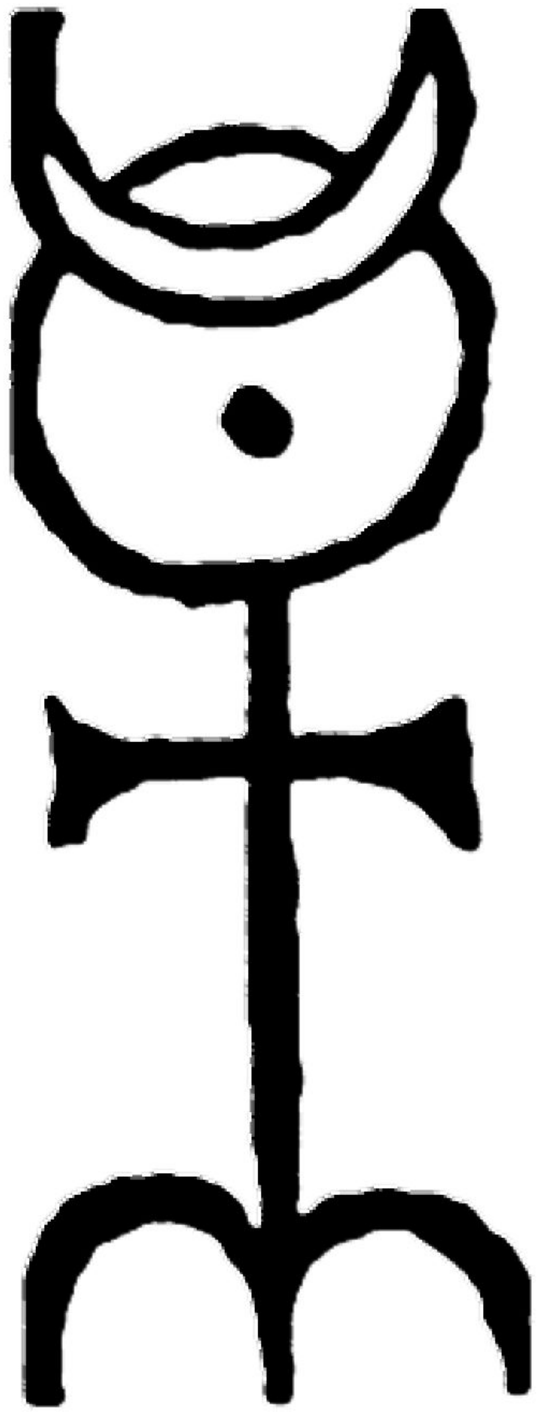
What John Dee is most known for was his work in attempting to commune with the spiritual world, particularly heavenly angels. This work was preceded by endeavors at understanding the unifying factor of nature, which he believed could be discovered through a combination of magical and mathematical means.

Dee wrote his first astrological book called *Monas Heiroglyphica* in which he discusses the various facets of the symbol he created to represent the cosmos.

This text draws heavily on Christian Kabbalism (often transliterated as Cabbala to distinguish it from Jewish Kabbalah) and was greatly coveted during his lifetime. Nevertheless, Dee's struggle to find a prestigious patron was an uphill battle, and eventually he tired of this work on the cosmos. It was then that Dee began to focus his efforts more seriously on his angelic search, eventually joining forces with a medium called Edward Kelley, a man 28 years younger than him, to conduct séances to interact with the angels. Through their continued meetings, Dee and Kelley claimed to have been given the gift of a new alphabet, said to have been revealed to them by angels. They called the language 'Angelic' and later it became known as 'Enochian', named after the Biblical patriarch Enoch.

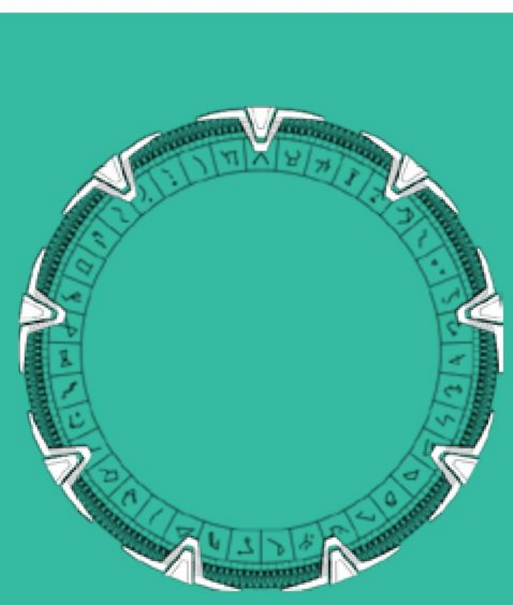
Dee claimed the Enochian alphabet was revealed to him and Kelley during "scrying sessions" when various texts and tables were received from angels. Scrying is a technique used by seers, psychics, and sorcerers to foretell the future and involves gazing into a reflective surface to receive messages.

It is documented that Dee and Kelley used certain objects such as a black obsidian mirror and a crystal ball to experience these visions. Dee acted as orator, directing prayers to God and the archangels for 15 minutes to an hour. Then a scrying stone was placed on a table, and the angels were called to manifest themselves.



Dee's glyph, representing (from top to bottom): the moon, the sun, the elements, and fire

Did You Know?



Stargate image: Max Willis/ CC BY SA 3.0

In 1994, the Enochian letters were used as glyphs to operate the interplanetary portal in the popular science fiction film *Stargate*.

The British Museum/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY SA 3.0

Above: John Dee's magical objects: obsidian gazing mirror (an obsidian Aztec cult object in the shape of a hand-mirror, brought to Europe in the late 1520s), crystal scrying ball, and decorated "Seals of God" to rest the crystal ball on

Right: Steganography in the hand of John Dee

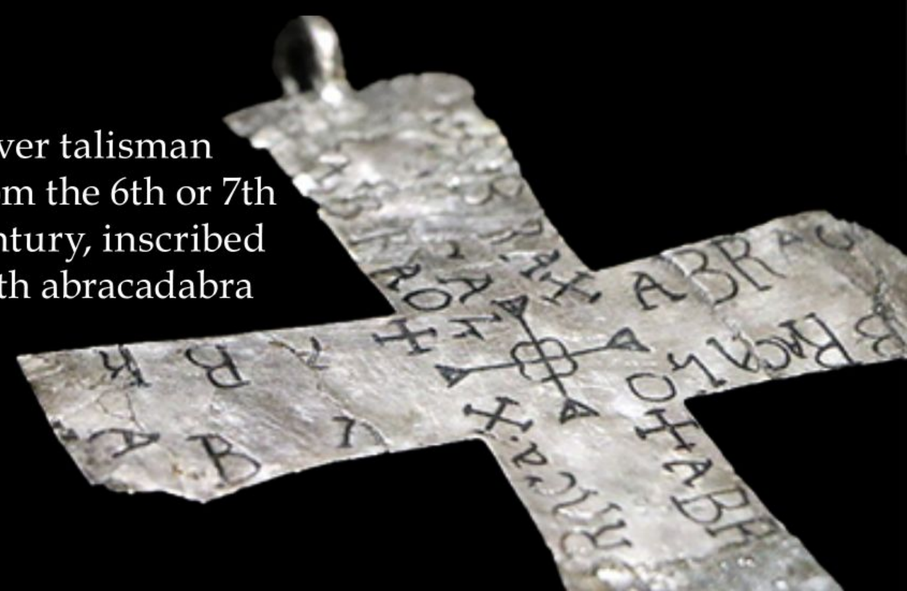
Magic Words

Abracadabra!

While 'Abracadabra' is commonly used by stage magicians today for the entertainment of the masses, this word is said to have its origins in the ancient Roman world. Back then, this word was not used for performances, but was believed to contain potent magical power within it.

According to another theory, the word 'Abracadabra' is derived from the Hebrew words *'ab, ben, ruach hakodesh'*, which translates as 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. Thus, the word 'Abracadabra' is in fact an invocation of the Holy Trinity.

Cangadoba/CC BY SA 4.0



Silver talisman from the 6th or 7th century, inscribed with abracadabra

Dee and Kelley would watch the stone and record everything they saw and heard. They were told by the angels that the magic would give superhuman powers to its practitioners, change the political structure of Europe, and herald the coming of the apocalypse.

Dee believed that what he was doing would be of benefit to posterity and documented the information into a series of manuscripts and workbooks. He never described the language used during the sessions as "Enochian" but preferred to call it "Angelical," the "Celestial Speech," the "First Language of God-Christ," and particularly "Adamical," because he asserted it was used by Adam in the Garden of Eden to name all of God's creatures.

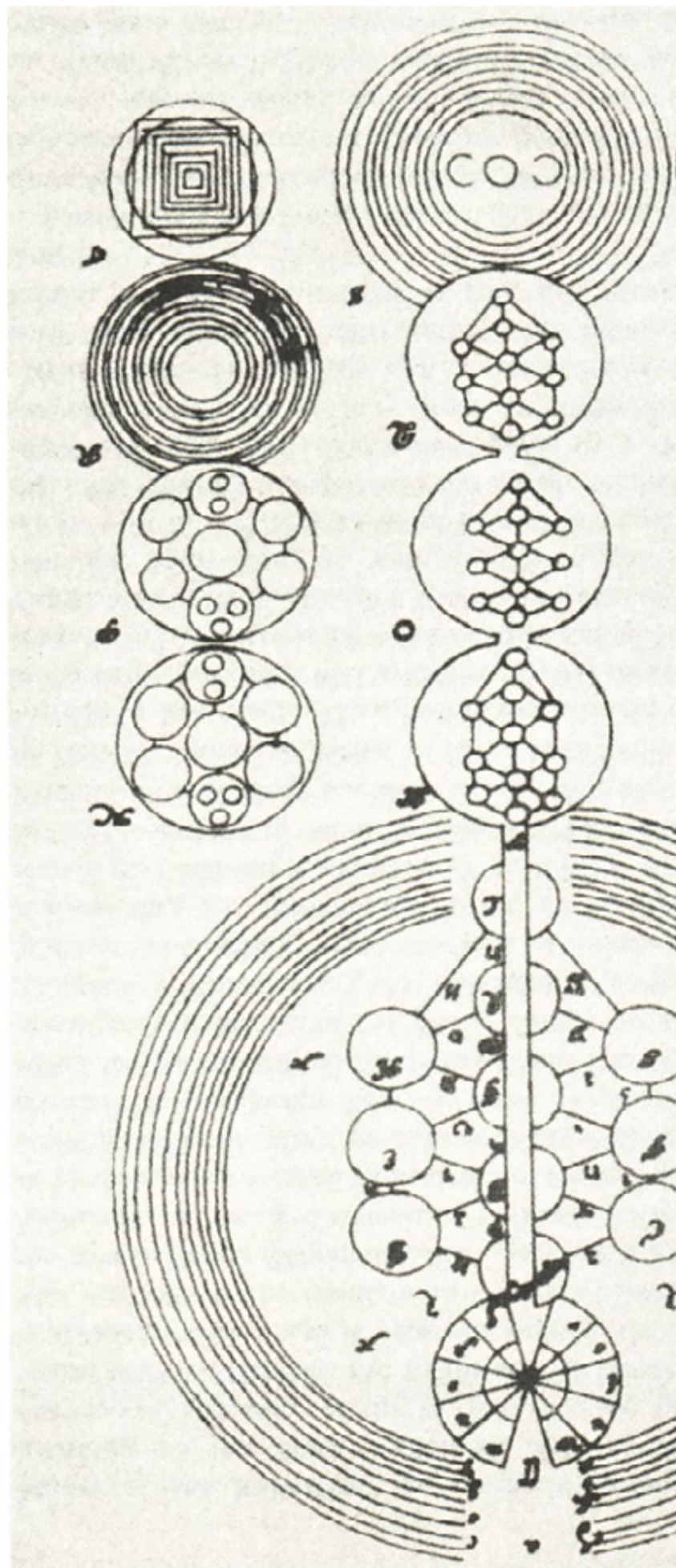
They were told by the angels that the magic would give superhuman powers to its practitioners, change the political structure of Europe, and herald the coming of the apocalypse

The Enochian language was picked up and popularized by occultists, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley, Israel Regardie, and Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan. Many Satanists have even included Enochian Keys in their rituals, some adopting the entire language for use.

THE FINAL YEARS

Less than a decade after meeting, Kelley and Dee's interests began to drift once more. Kelley claimed that he was also personally gifted in alchemy and could turn ordinary metals into gold. As such, Kelley continued to work with Dee as his scryer, but focused much more of his time on an attempt to

John Dee and Edward Kelly evoking a spirit, illustration 1825



transform substances and find the legendary Philosopher's Stone.

Though they shared a close and cooperative partnership, it was often described as "quarrelsome" and "tense" by both contemporaries and historians. The seven years they spent together, leading nomadic lives and working endlessly on their newfound alphabet, came to an abrupt end in 1589, when Kelley returned to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II and Dee went home to England. Dee outlived his former friend by many years, and continued their work, immortalizing them both with his Angelical/Enochian literature.

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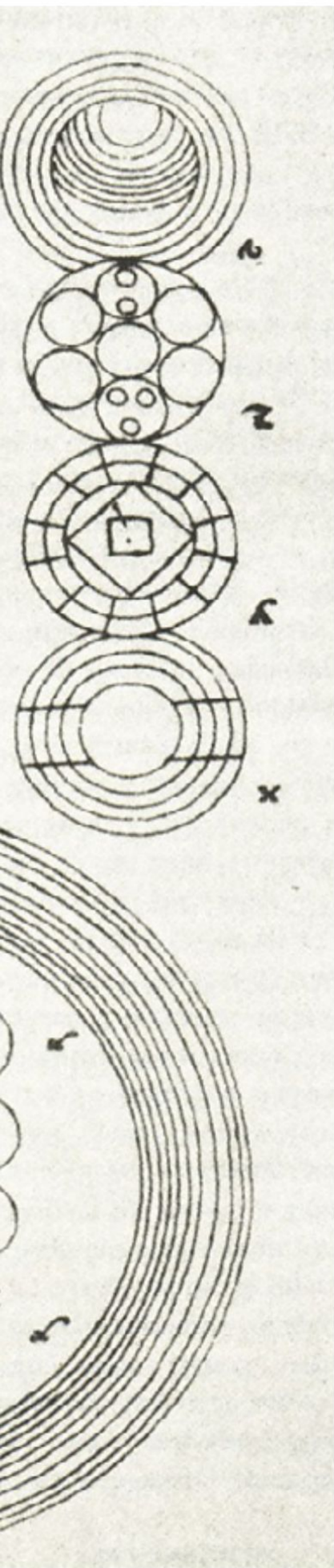


Diagram from 17th-century book on Christian Cabbala

The Book of Soyga

The Book of Soyga or the *Aldaraia sive Soyga vocor*, was written in the 16th century as a treatise on magic. The occultist John Dee owned one of only two known copies. Not unlike Dee's own work on the Enochian alphabet, the Book of Soyga appears to contain another sort of alphabet—possibly a variation of Hebrew with alchemical symbols encoded within. Recovered in 1994 after having been missing for the nearly four hundred years after Dee allegedly sold it for cash and his death in 1608, the book is considered one of the most perplexing volumes from the 16th century.

Written in Latin, the Book of Soyga appears to discuss beliefs of Renaissance magic and identifies various angels and demons, as well as depicting an unusual alphabet and multiple streams of backward words. It is teeming with numerical symbols that leave many scholars to believe the book has something to do with the Christian Cabbala, a text written from the Jewish Kabbalah with a Christian perspective.

It is entirely possible that the book influenced John Dee's work far more than currently realized and presently understood without the aid of a proper translation of both the Enochian language and the Book of Soyga. ■

Over time, Dee's work in the occult became heavily criticized and, after parting ways with Kelley in 1589, he became Warden of Christ's College in Manchester, England. He died a poor man's death in 1608, having fallen out of favor with Elizabeth I's successor James VI and I.

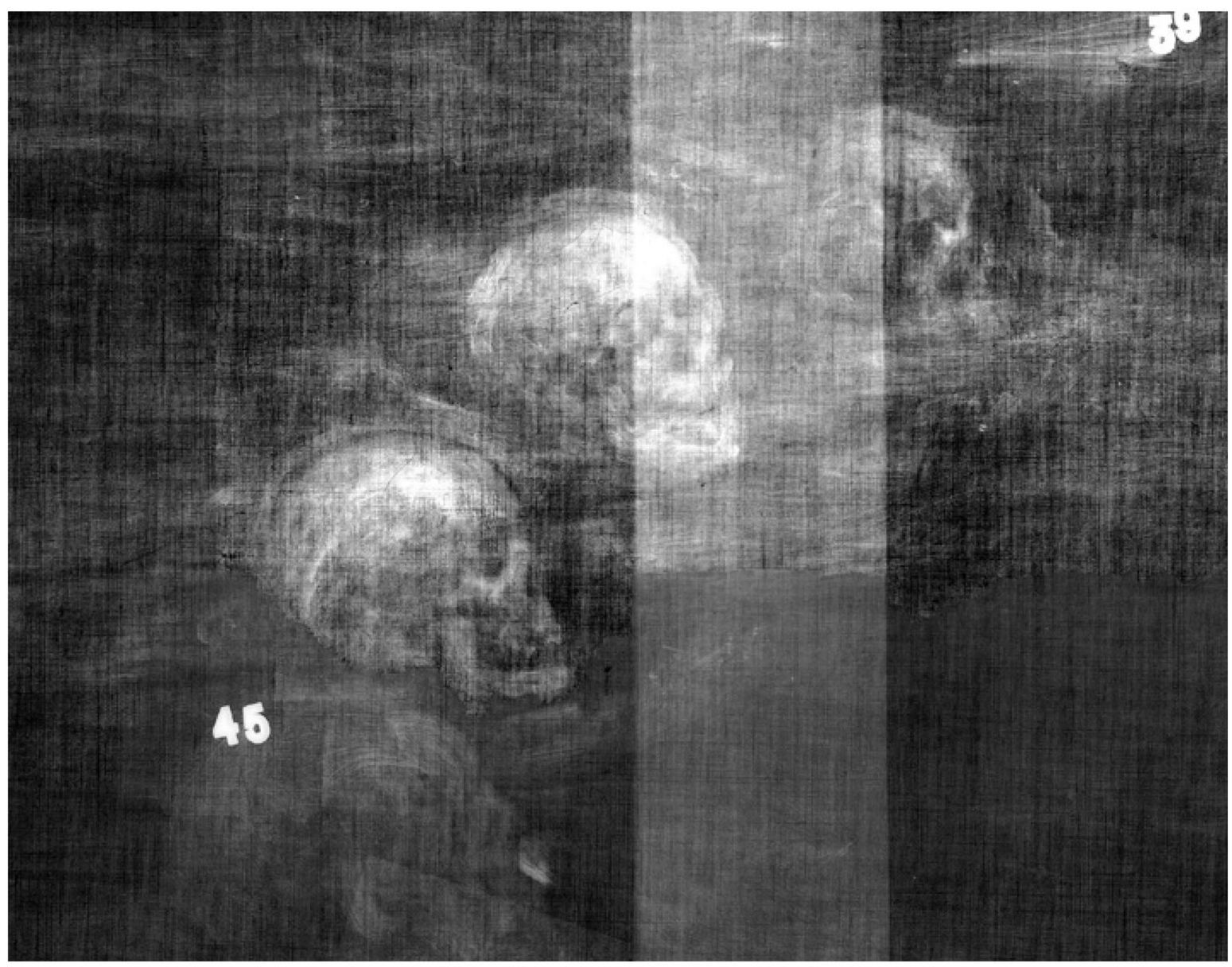
Despite the way his life ended, John Dee was considered somewhat of a wizard in Elizabethan circles. Even with so few followers of his angelic endeavors, his work evolved into a modern magical and religious practice that continues to be utilized by occult organizations around the world.

STILL CREATING A DRAMATIC SCENE

In 2016, researchers got another reminder of John Dee's mysterious ways. They were shocked when they discovered a hidden element through x-ray analysis of the famous painting depicting 'John Dee performing an experiment before Queen Elizabeth I'. It's been revealed that Dee was originally painted standing before the queen in a circle of skulls.

It is not certain why the artist Henry Gillard Glindoni initially painted the skulls, however, it is possible that "After Elizabeth died, scholars would paint Dee as a deluded fool. It's that legacy that may have inspired Glindoni to add the skulls to his painting, perhaps along with the Victorian-era obsession with death. But why did he then paint over them?"

Curator Katie Birkwood provided a reason, "Glindoni had to make it look like what we now see, which is august and serious, from what it was, which was occult and spooky. That epitomizes the two different impressions of Dee which people have, and the fight between them." ■



Right and opposite: Detail of X-ray of the Glindoni painting showing skulls in a ring around John Dee

Courtesy of Royal College of Physicians/National Gallery, London/
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Merlin
The Magician

|| By Graham Philips

Two Historical Figures that Inspired the Legend

Most people are familiar with the Hollywood version of Merlin the Magician, or royal puppet master at Camelot, who holds the fates of his protégé King Arthur and that of the Britons firmly in his magical hands. It is probable that King Arthur was a historical figure, but could it be that Merlin, the wizard, was a historical figure as well?

The most popular account of Merlin we know today derives from the romantic fiction of the Middle Ages, first composed during the 12th century, beginning with the work of the Welsh cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth around 1135. Here, Merlin is depicted as the real power behind the throne: he is King Arthur's mentor, his royal advisor, and he manipulates affairs of state with magical powers. The action is set in the sixth century, shortly after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Historically, during this period Britain was divided into many feuding kingdoms—the nation's plight made worse by the Anglo-Saxons who were invading from their homeland in northern Germany. The invaders eventually conquered much of Britain, driving the native inhabitants west. Ultimately, southern Britain became two separate countries: England, founded by the Anglo-Saxons, and Wales, the region of the Welsh, the English name for the native Britons.

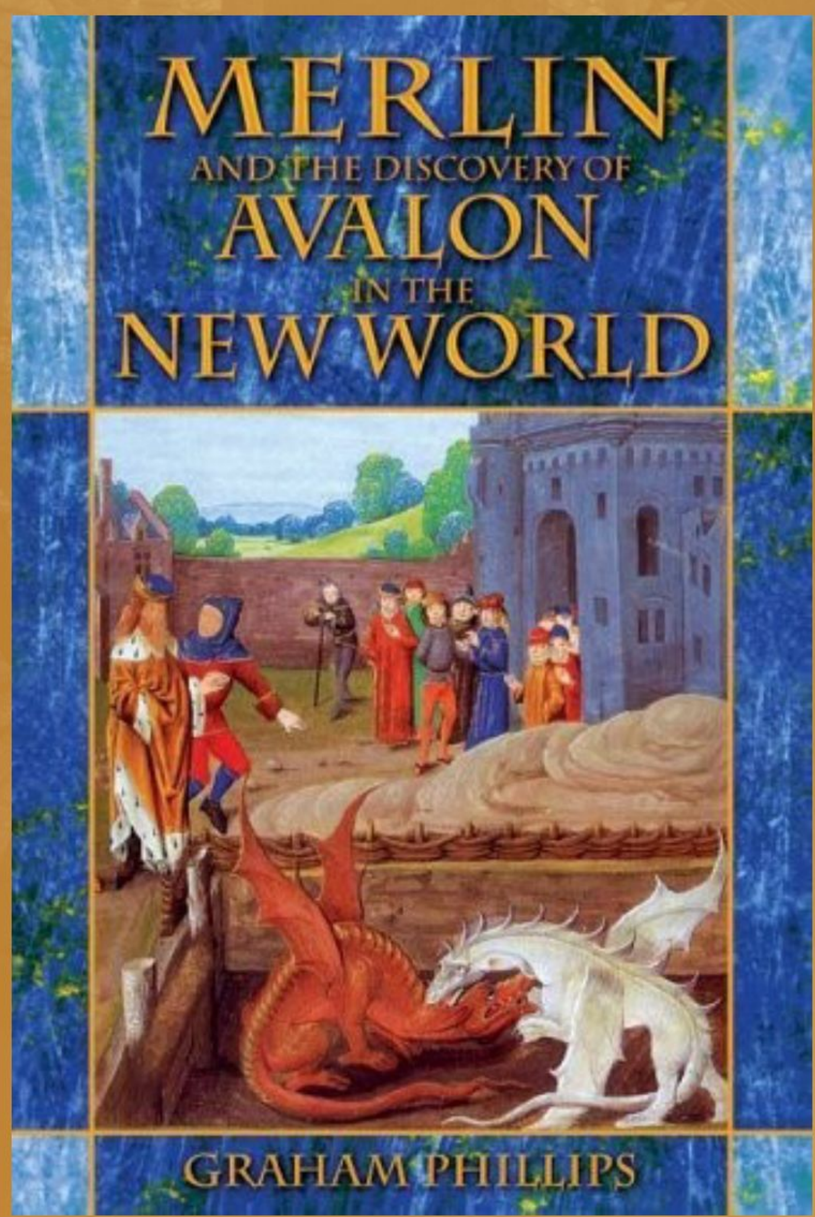
This period of conflict and uncertainty is popularly known as the Dark Ages, an era from which few written records survive, and it was during these turbulent times that Arthur is said to have lived. He united the British kingdoms to halt the Anglo-Saxons, we are told, establishing a brief age of peace and prosperity. It ends tragically, however, when Arthur dies in battle, drawn into civil conflict with his own family. Having failed to secure the Britons' future, Merlin is sent mad with grief and ends his days as a crazed, forest-dwelling hermit.

Although this story is embroiled with Medieval fantasy, earlier Dark Age works do exist to suggest that the Arthur of fiction may have been based on a genuine historical figure; more remarkably, Merlin too. In these accounts, Merlin appears under the original Welsh rendering of the name, Myrddin, and is said to have been a royal advisor and a poet who possessed the gift of prophecy. Such people—poets attributed with second sight—did exist during the post-Roman era and were retained by various chieftains to act as both

councilors and chroniclers, composing poems to record the exploits of their king. They were known as "bards," and Myrddin is said to have been one of them; works dating from the sixth century are even attributed to him.

Preserved in the National Library of Wales, a manuscript called *The Black Book of Carmarthen* contains two poems, *The Greetings* and *The Apple Trees*, both involving a battle at a place called Arfderydd in northern Britain, after which the author claims to been driven out of his mind and forced to live alone in a nearby forest. Another seemingly contemporary poem in the manuscript, titled *The Conversation of Myrddin and Taliesin,* concerns Myrddin and another bard discussing this same battle. These works all imply that the romantic fictional Merlin was based in part on the Myrddin of the poems: he is living a reclusive forest existence, having lost his wits, exactly like Merlin in the Arthurian tales.

Evidence that this Myrddin historically existed can also be found in the Welsh Annals, a 10th-century chronicle preserved in the British Library in London. It records the very battle referenced in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* poems, specifically naming the bard. An entry for the year 573 reads: "The Battle of Arfderydd in which… Myrddin went mad."



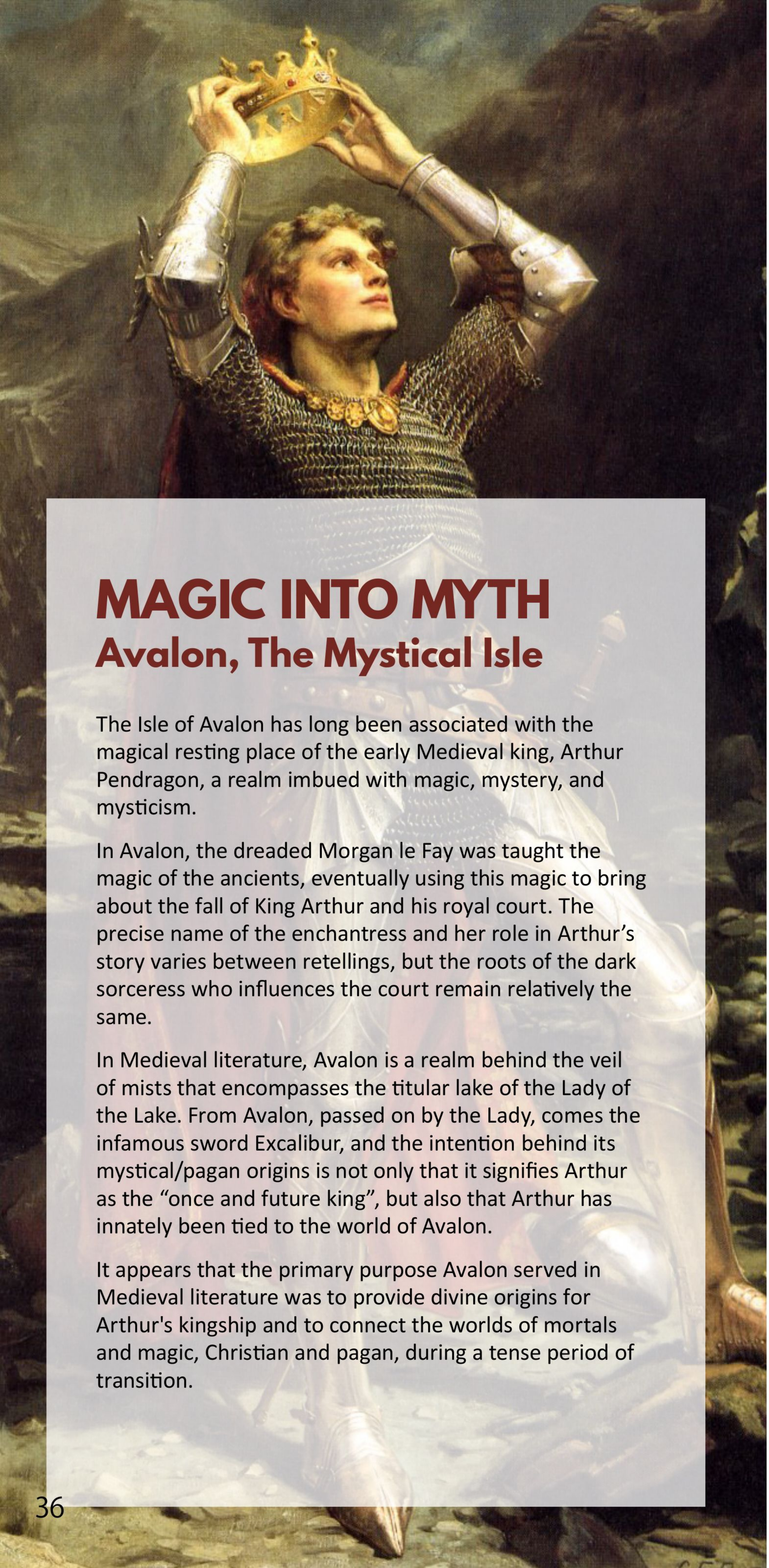
Merlin and the Discovery of Avalon in the New World

By Graham Phillips

Graham Phillips presents compelling evidence that the legend of Merlin was based on the life of an historical figure – the last Roman to rule the island of Britain. In the medieval Arthurian tales, Merlin was said to have been the guardian of the Holy Grail, a sacred cup that was kept in a secret castle. Stories relate how Merlin's descendants continued as guardians of the Grail until they became lost in the mists of time. In this real-life historical detective story, Graham not only identifies both an historical relic and a real castle behind these myths, he traces the descendants of the historical Merlin to a family still alive today – the Spencer family of Princess Diana.

GrahamPhillips.net

Merlin appears under the original Welsh rendering of the name, Myrddin, and is said to have been a royal advisor and a poet who possessed the gift of prophecy



MAGIC INTO MYTH

Avalon, The Mystical Isle

The Isle of Avalon has long been associated with the magical resting place of the early Medieval king, Arthur Pendragon, a realm imbued with magic, mystery, and mysticism.

In Avalon, the dreaded Morgan le Fay was taught the magic of the ancients, eventually using this magic to bring about the fall of King Arthur and his royal court. The precise name of the enchantress and her role in Arthur's story varies between retellings, but the roots of the dark sorceress who influences the court remain relatively the same.

In Medieval literature, Avalon is a realm behind the veil of mists that encompasses the titular lake of the Lady of the Lake. From Avalon, passed on by the Lady, comes the infamous sword Excalibur, and the intention behind its mystical/pagan origins is not only that it signifies Arthur as the "once and future king", but also that Arthur has innately been tied to the world of Avalon.

It appears that the primary purpose Avalon served in Medieval literature was to provide divine origins for Arthur's kingship and to connect the worlds of mortals and magic, Christian and pagan, during a tense period of transition.

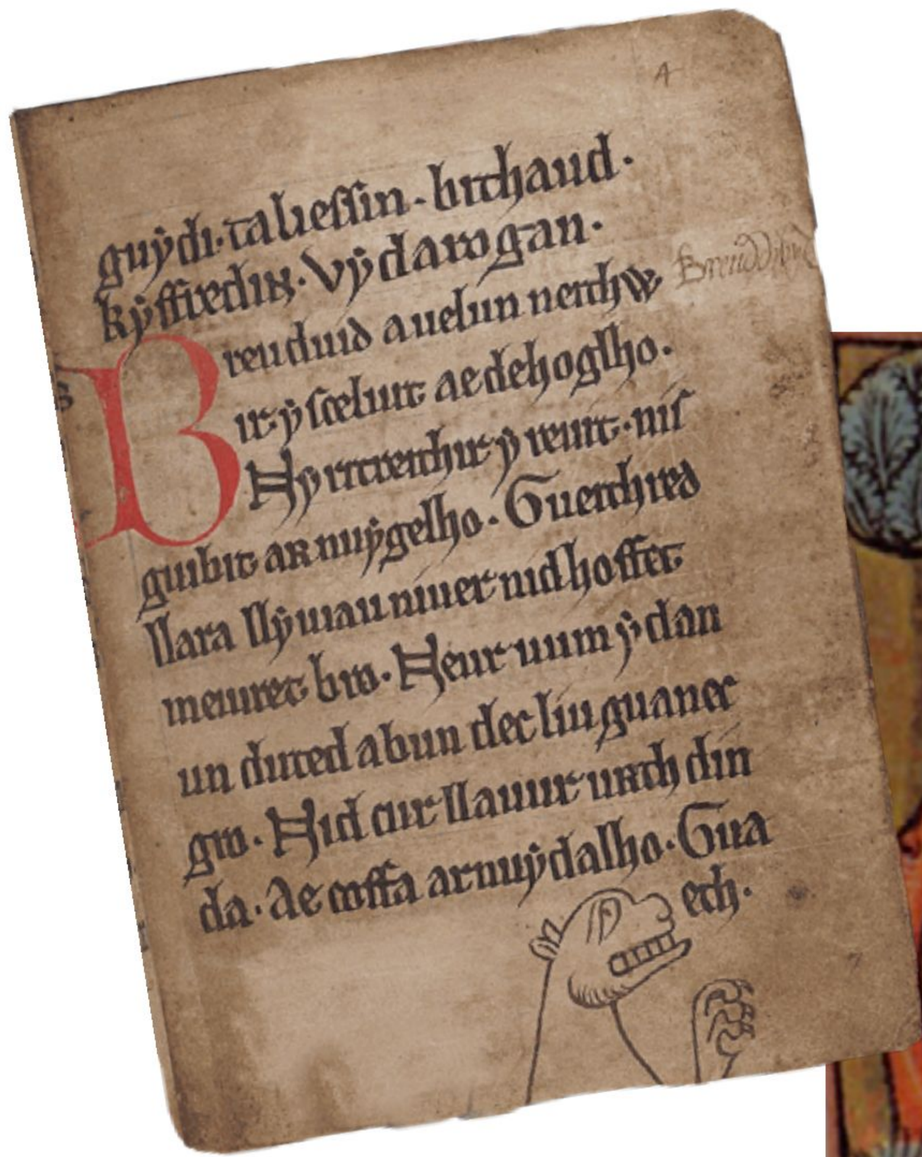
So, Merlin the magician does seem to have been based in part on a real-life sixth-century bard. Unfortunately, however, he could not have been a contemporary of a historical King Arthur. One of the earliest surviving works to reference Arthur is the *History of the Britons* by a monk named Nennius, who wrote around the year 830. Unlike the Medieval romancers writing over three centuries later, who elaborated their accounts with fanciful themes, Nennius merely relates Arthur's purported military achievements. His most decisive battle was the Battle of Badon, seemingly fought near the city of Bath.

Another monk, Gildas, who wrote within living memory of the event, records the battle as a historical event that occurred around the year 500. Although Gildas neglects to name the British leader at the time, his work does help to date the period in which Arthur was originally thought to have lived. If Merlin was present at the much later Battle of Arfderydd in 573, then he would have to have been well over 100 years old; An acceptable age for a fabled wizard perhaps, but most unlikely in reality, especially at a time when the average life expectancy was very much lower than today.

But there is another historical figure that could be our Merlin. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his 12th-century *History of the Kings of Britain,* first introduces Merlin as a boy. A British king called Vortigern captures the young Merlin and takes him to

his fortress, said to be on a hill now called Dinas Emrys in North Wales. The king had been having trouble constructing the fort: the foundations kept collapsing, and his magicians had told him that to put things right he must sacrifice a child. But just as Merlin is about to be killed, he has a vision of two dragons, one red, the other white, that fight each other in a pool in a cavern below the fort. This, he tells Vortigern, is why the building keeps collapsing. He shows Vortigern where to dig; the pool is found and the dragons are released. The king is so impressed that he spares Merlin's life, appointing him as one of his advisors and rewarding him with land.

Although the story is clearly a legend rather than a historical event, Geoffrey did not invent it. Exactly the same account appears almost verbatim in Nennius' *History of the Britons*, written 300 years earlier. Except here, however, the boy is not called Merlin but Ambrosius. Nennius refers to the same character later in his work, as becoming an important British leader after Vortigern's demise. Even though the story of the two dragons is fable or anecdotal, Ambrosius was a historical figure. He is referenced in the work of Gildas as a warrior leader of the Britons in the late fifth century. Interestingly, he disappears from history at the very time that Arthur is said to have become king. From this it is clear that, as far as Geoffrey of Monmouth was concerned, Merlin and Ambrosius were one and the same.



Top Left: A page from the Black Book of Carmarthen.
Top Right: Illustration of Merlin from the Middle Ages.
Above: Illumination of a 15th-century manuscript of Historia Regum Britanniae.

There survives no record of how, where, or when Ambrosius died, so it is just possible that as he grew older, he retired from military life to act as an advisor to the British kings. Unlike the Merlin recorded in the *Welsh Annals*, Ambrosius certainly did live at the right time, and would have been of the right age to have become the Merlin connected with King Arthur.

It's reasonable to infer that the legend of Merlin, as it developed during the Middle Ages, was inspired by two separate figures that lived decades apart. Although the character's name seems to have been derived from the second of them, only the first could have had genuine associations with a historical Arthur.

It's reasonable to infer that the legend of Merlin, as it developed during the Middle Ages, was inspired by two separate figures that lived decades apart

Ambrosius, whose full name was Ambrosius Aurelianus, is thought to have come from Amesbury in southern England, a town that bears his name. Linguists believe that the name Amesbury derives from the early English Ambrose Bury, meaning "Ambrosius' Fort". And it is here he is said to have been buried, in a crypt that still lies beneath the Medieval abbey later built on the site. Hidden away in a corner of Amesbury Abbey, there is even an ancient stone bust, said to be an effigy of Ambrosius. If true, it might just be the only representation of the historical Merlin still to survive.

Interestingly, the famous Stonehenge stands just two miles away, a monument which Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed was built by Merlin himself. ■

The ancient stone bust from Amesbury Abbey, thought to depict Ambrosius Aurelianus. This may be the only representation of the historical Merlin to still survive.

Tengu Magic Wreaks Havoc

|| By Nisa Ryan

Legends say Tengu are protectors of Japanese mountains and the Buddhist faith, but also mischievous tricksters who use magic. Several stories of the Tengu are still told today.

An Invisibility Cloak

A boy was playing with a long, hollow piece of bamboo. He pretended he could see far away things, ghosts and yokai, and even a dragon's treasure.

A Tengu resting in a tree watched the boy with fascination, thinking this must be magic bamboo for the boy to see such things. He decided he wanted it.

After all, he was a great yokai and this was just a human boy. So, the Tengu approached the boy and showed him his invisibility cloak. The Tengu offered to trade:

"If you give me your bamboo, I will give you my magical cloak. It would be so much more fun to move around unseen than to see far away but unable to do anything!"

The boy agreed and the Tengu was pleased, thinking he could fly to the treasures the boy saw and become wealthy. The boy ran off, creating mischief with the magic cloak while the Tengu examined his new bamboo toy.

The Tengu tried to make the bamboo work, but finally realized he had been tricked. He tried to find the invisible boy, but couldn't. So he took revenge by cursing the cloak. The boy was never able to remove it and was invisible for the rest of his miserable life.

The Magic Fan

A man stole a Tengu fan and discovered that by fanning his face, he could make his nose grow long, like a Tengu, or shorten it. He wondered how this magic could be useful.

Then he saw a beautiful, wealthy maiden. Being poor, he knew he had no chance at marriage, so he concocted a nefarious plan. He followed her home and fanned her face while she slept. In the morning her nose had grown hideously long. Her father was distraught; who would ever marry his ugly daughter?

The man arrived and claimed to have a cure, but he would only help if he could have some of the family fortune and marry the maiden. The father immediately agreed, so the man began casting spells and dancing around. That night he snuck in and gently waved the fan across the maiden. The next day her nose was back to normal and the couple married.

The man was happy with his beautiful wife, home, and riches. But his happiness was short-lived. One hot summer night, the man picked up the magic fan by accident and fell asleep while cooling himself with it.

The next morning his nose was so big it had broken through the roof. The Tengu who owned the fan saw his nose and reclaimed the fan, cursing the man to live out his life horribly disfigured and lonely. ■

Left: Statue of a Tengu

A 'Disgraced Monk' mask used widely at festivals

ONE RING TO RULE

Magic Rings of Love, Protection & Power

By Valda Roric & Kerry Sullivan

THE richest treasures are not always glittering gold hoards or dazzling mountains of precious stones. Sometimes the biggest prizes come in the smallest packages. That's true of the small Hobbits from J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*. And it's true of the 'One Ring' itself in the tale – a malevolent band forged by a Dark Lord to enslave the whole of Middle-Earth. Though it was small, it was deadly, and had the power to corrupt its wearer and change the world.

Such magic rings capture the imagination. They exist in myths around the globe – and they come to life through the hands of a dedicated craftsman, inspired by tales of love, protection, and ambition...and sometimes the desire to rule the world!

King Solomon's Magical Ring

According to the writings of Medieval Arabic writers, King Solomon had a very valuable gold signet ring. The ring was not only precious, but also magical and some believe it was a gift from God. With it, Solomon could supposedly seal commands to spirits and demons and control the four elements. Of all his treasures, this ring is regarded as the most valuable.

With his ring, Solomon could supposedly seal commands to spirits and demons and control the four elements

According to the tyrant Polycrates of Samos, as recorded by ancient Greek historian Herodotus, a demon named Sakhr got hold of the ring and ruled in King Solomon's stead for 40 days. The demon eventually threw the ring into the sea, where it was swallowed by a fish. It was caught by a fisherman, who presented the fish to King Solomon, and he retrieved the ring from the fish's belly.

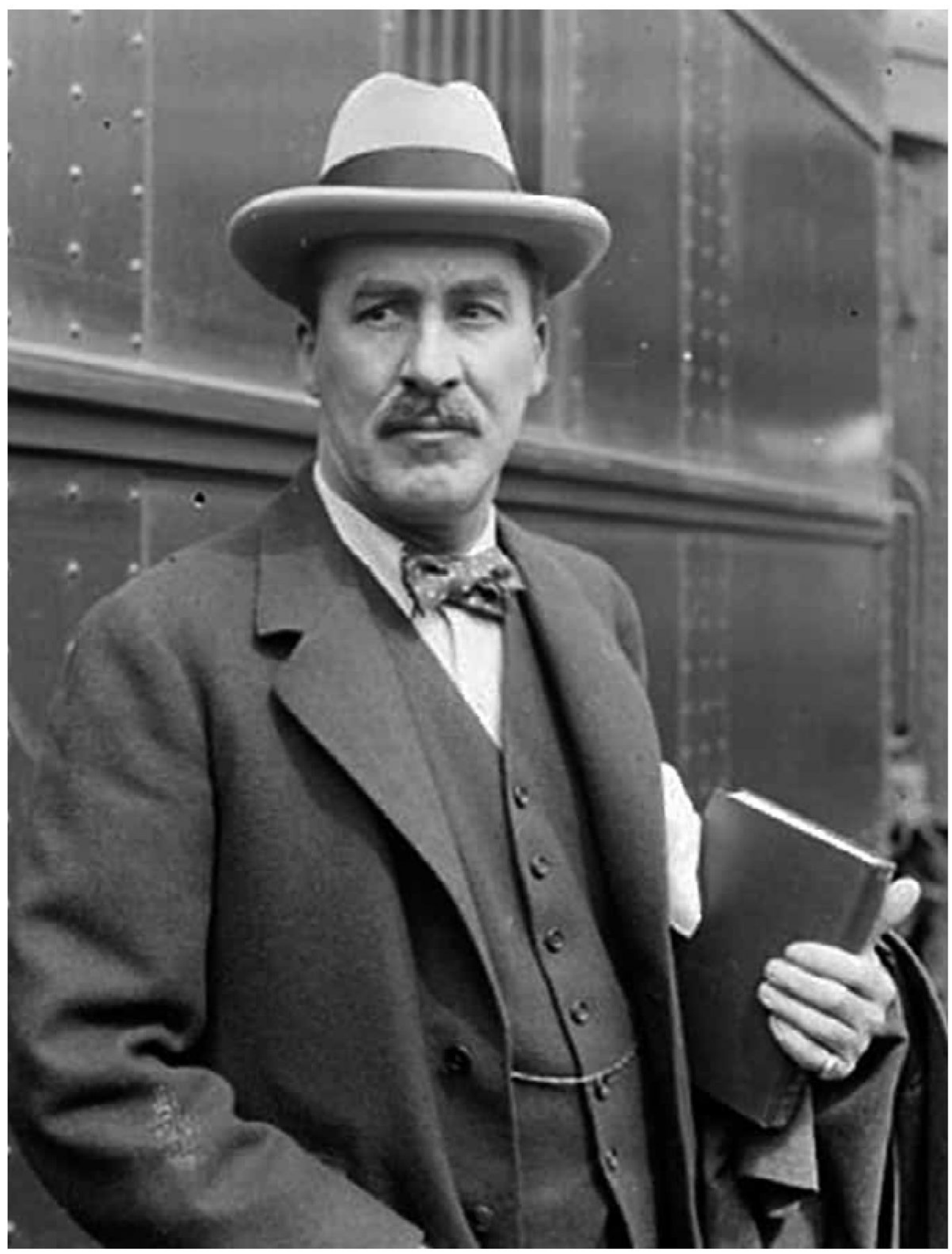
The precious ring was said to have been buried alongside the body of King Solomon. However, nobody has found King Solomon's tomb. According to legend, the one who finds the ring will become the ruler of the world.

Howard Carter's Ring of Protection

Howard Carter, the archaeologist who discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922, was surprisingly unaffected by the alleged curse of King Tut's tomb that warned whoever disturbed the pharaoh's final resting place, would die. The so-called curse may have actually been a case of exposure to ancient pathogens released from the tomb, but in any case, Carter did not suffer the consequences.

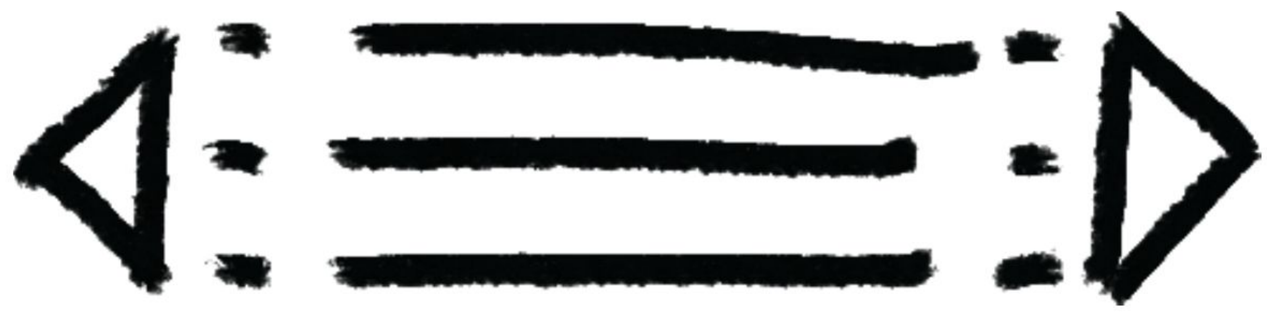
There is a tale that Carter wore a 5,000-year-old ring that was discovered in Aswan in the tomb of a priest called Jua. The ring was bought in 1860 by the Egyptologist Marquis d'Aigrain and gifted to Carter as an amulet, protecting him from the 'curse' that took the life of his partner Lord Carnarvon and 18 other people.

The ring features engraved geometric figures such as three straight lines and triangles, arranged according to the principles of esoteric knowledge. The design was meant to protect a person from danger, curses, and black magic. Today, the ring is known as "the Ring of Ra" or the "Atlantis Ring", as it is believed by the esoteric community that it was originally designed by the people of Atlantis and that Egyptians are the descendants of the Atlanteans. As for the ring, a theory is that it operates according to the principles of radionics (electromagnetic radiation) – the geometric shapes create a faint energy forcefield that may have positive effects on the wearer.



Ring: Mateusz Opasiński/CC BY SA 3.0

Top: A recreation of the 'Louksor' or Atlantis Ring
Above: Howard Carter, 1924
Below: The design of the Atlantis Ring



Said to be influenced by the powerful love spell of a magic ring, King Charlemagne fell deeply in love with a lady. Some legends say it was his queen, Lady Fastrada, and some say it was a young German girl. He loved her so much that he even began to neglect his affairs of state to be with her. When his lady passed away, Charlemagne continued worshiping her dead body and he refused to bury it, despite the pungent odor. One day, when Charlemagne was absent, Archbishop Turpin entered the bedroom and noticed a precious ring under the tongue of the corpse, which he took with him.

Charlemagne and the Love Ring

Charlemagne, 1512

The spell was broken and upon Charlemagne's return, he found the decomposing corpse and demanded to have the body buried immediately. However, the magic of the ring had a strange effect. Charlemagne began to direct his passion towards Archbishop Turpin, who suspected the magical powers of the ring. In order to escape Charlemagne's advances, Turpin threw the ring in a lake. According to legend, Charlemagne fell in love with the lake and ordered a magnificent palace to be built near it. The town located at the lake is Aix-la-Chapelle, where Charlemagne was buried.

Genghis Khan's Swastika Ring

Genghis Khan knew how to benefit from Mongolian magic. In the 12th century, he reigned over the Mongolian Empire and some believe this was due to a powerful magic ring. The ring had a ruby engraved with a magic symbol and it was worn by both Genghis Khan as well as his nephew, Kublai Khan. They always wore it on the forefinger of their right hand.

Historians have wondered about how an uneducated man became so powerful that he was able to lead a tribe of nomads to conquer empires. Perhaps the power lay in the ring, which was engraved with a mystical Indian symbol. Some claim that this symbol originated from Hyperborea, the long-lost continent. The symbol is the dextrogyre swastika, which is believed to have positive effects. Its opposite is the sinistrogyre swastika, which was used by Hitler. Perhaps by modifying the direction of the symbol, Hitler orchestrated the reverse of the positive effects, attracting misfortune with an evil swastika, which turned against him and his actions. As for Genghis Khan's mysterious ring, many Asian archaeologists and politicians are still searching for it.

The ring had a ruby engraved with a magic symbol and it was worn by both Genghis Khan as well as his nephew, Kublai Khan. They always wore it on the forefinger of their right hand

THE ONE RING

In the fourth century AD, Silvianus, a Roman stationed in Gloucestershire, England, visited the elaborate baths of the Celtic God Nodens, where his golden ring was stolen. He suspected Senicianus had stolen the ring. Silvianus erected a defixio or 'curse tablet' at the temple, which read: "For the god Nodens. Silvianus has lost a ring and has donated one half [its worth] to Nodens. Among those named Senicianus permit no good health until it is returned to the temple of Nodens."

The ring, with a diameter of one inch and weighing 12 grams, has 10 facets and a square bezel engraved with the image of the Roman goddess Venus. A Christian owner, perhaps Senicianus, had the ring crudely inscribed with the letters "SENICIANE VIVAS IIN DE." Presumably, the inscriber meant to say "SENICIANE VIVAS IN DEO" or "Senicianus, may you live with God," however, he misspelled 'IN' with two i's and therefore had no room for the O in DEO.

Little is known about the fate of Senicianus, but remarkably the ring was discovered in 1785 in a field at Silchester, a town of Roman origin, by a farmer. Falling on hard times, the farmer sold the ring to the Chute family of the nearby country house, The Vyne. In 1888, Chaloner Chute published a paper on the ring, but only in 1929 did Sir Mortimer Wheeler establish the possible link between the Vyne Ring and Silvianus' curse tablet.

J.R.R. Tolkien, at the time a professor of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic literature at Oxford University, was asked by his friend Wheeler to help clarify who the obscure god Nodens was and what role he might have played in the history of the ring. Many now believe that the 'Ring of Senicianus' was the inspiration for the 'one ring that unites them all' in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings.* ■

Top: The Ring of Silvianus, discovered in a ploughed field in Hampshire, England | Photo: Becks/CC BY 2.0/Deriv

The Sādhu

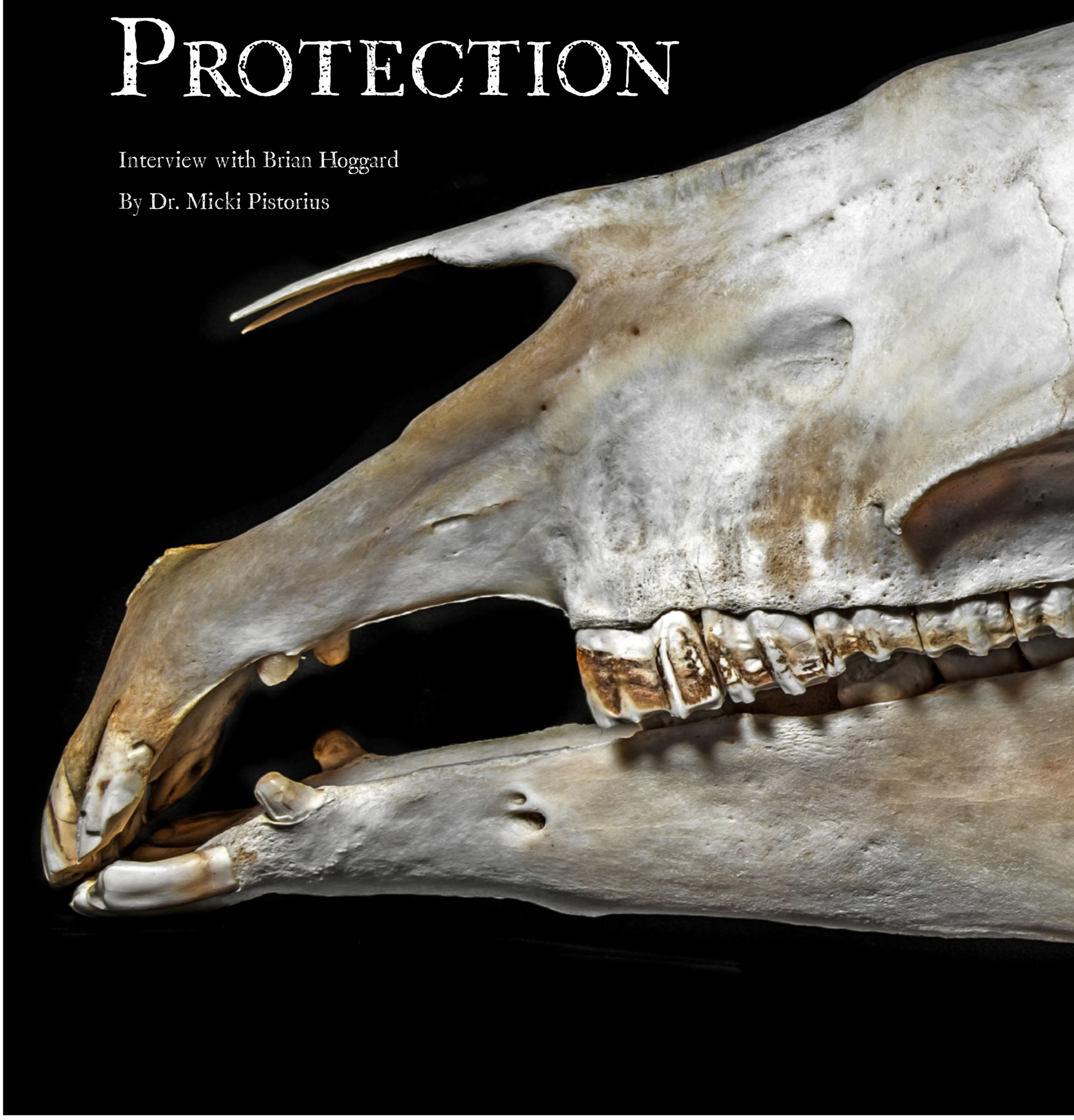
The Sādhu man rowing his boat in Varanasi, India has renounced his previous life and elected *vairagya*, a desire to achieve *moksha* or liberation, by leaving the world and to focus on his spiritual development. Sādhu is a Sanskrit term meaning "good man," referring to the Sādhu paying off his own and the karma of his community through his austere practices. Sādhus are dependent on donations and food from people. They often wear simple clothing, such as saffron-colored clothing in Hinduism and white (or nothing!) in Jainism, symbolizing their *sannyāsa* or renunciation of worldly possessions. Like this man, they wear their hair in thick dreadlocks called *jata*.

RuslanKphoto | AdobeStock

The Archaeology of Magical House Protection

Interview with Brian Hoggard

By Dr. Micki Pistorius



Brian Hoggard is an independent researcher who has been working on the archaeology of folk magic since 1999. He has written about Bredon Hill in Worcestershire, Crusader Castles, and many pieces dealing with archaeology relating to witchcraft beliefs.

Apotropaios, the name of Brian's website, means 'turning away from evil' in Greek. In Medieval times, people reverted to what seems like strange practices, such as entombing dried cats in walls and concealing old shoes and witch bottles in their homes to divert evil energies of witches seeking them out. The *genius loci* or local spirit had to be appeased and sacrifices were made to buildings.

MP: How did witchcraft feature in Medieval Britain?

BH: I specialize in the post-Medieval era but there are some similarities. In the absence of scientific explanations for the world around them, people believed that many ills had a supernatural force behind them. Sometimes this was the work of someone skilled in magic, a cunning-man, wise-woman, witch or wizard, and sometimes this could be the work of God or another supernatural being. To most people, magic was a real force, as real as the elements, and certain skilled people could wield it for good or ill. There were also thought to be certain people who just had a natural gift, again for good or ill.

Could you please set the scene regarding the magical nuance that parishioners would experience by just attending church during Medieval times?

Pre-Reformation churches in England were Catholic churches and heavily decorated inside with art and sculpture relating to heaven and hell, saints and demons, God and the Virgin Mary. The congregation was separated from the priests by a screen called a Rood screen, atop which was a figure of Christ at Judgement Day. Services were conducted in Latin (which sometimes the priest learned by rote – depending on how well educated they were) and were perfumed with incense and illuminated by candlelight. These were mysterious and magical rituals to many people but there was little knowledge of the bible transmitted because it was conducted in Latin – consequently many parishioners had a poor understanding of Christianity but did have a strong

feeling for the magical or supernatural powers at work in religion.

Post-reformation (which was a fairly long and slow process), much of the supernatural imagery was gone from churches; Lady Chapels were often abandoned, saints shrines were gone, the Rood screens were taken away, and services were conducted in English. Much of the mystery and magic surrounding the church was removed, replaced with a more austere religion. However, the folk beliefs and magical beliefs held by normal people remained.

Who were the cunning persons of a village and what was their role?

Cunning-folk varied considerably in what their specific skills were and as a result, people would sometimes travel far to find the specialist they needed. Some were skilled herbalists, fortune tellers, thief detectives, astrologers, healers, midwives, or un-witchers. Most were a combination of some of these. They provided a valuable role in society in an age before nationalized medical services, police forces, and science. When you needed something done, they would normally be the first port of call. A late 16th-century clergyman, George Giffard complained that his parishioners treated the local cunning-person 'as if they were his God'. Cunning-folk were often involved in identifying witchcraft and providing remedies for it, including some of the range of counter-witchcraft practices.

Were they in competition with local priests?

Not in competition exactly, they dominated the field in terms of supernatural problem-solving.

Can you tell us more about Black Witchcraft and the Prestwitch figurines?

There is plenty of evidence for black witchcraft, mainly in the form of dolls and figurines, but there are also written curses. At Prestwich, there is a pub next to the church and in the basement of the pub, a false wall was discovered, behind which was a bag containing three nicely carved human figures, a pile of 'vegetable matter,' and a dead cat. It would appear that the cat was sacrificed, some roots were gathered, and some figures (the targets) carved. What was done in this basement was regarded as so important it could not be touched and, indeed, a wall was built to hide it.

Does folklore illustrate that people feared gargoyles, demons, and fairies?

Gargoyles are drain spouts on churches (gargles) which are often decorated as demonic beasts. Grotesques of all kinds can be found on Medieval churches and they represent people's ideas of the kinds of creatures that might exist in hell. Images like this would have been very potent and could haunt the imagination, similar perhaps to how a horror movie would do so now for people. Their presence in churches was a reminder of what you might face should you go to hell.

Pre-Victorian fairy belief was very serious. Yes, there was a firm belief among many that there was an invisible race of creatures living a parallel existence to ours. At certain nodes on the landscape, (usually prehistoric structures such as barrows), the worlds intersected, and you could see proof of their existence in the form of tiny flint arrowheads. People used to think these were 'elf-shot' - certain proof of the presence of fairies. These were, in fact, Neolithic arrowheads. People also believed (and still do in places like Iceland, Scandinavia, and Ireland) that the fairies have paths that you must not disturb. If you do, you can have terrible problems and potentially end up being elf-shot.

Moving on to the archaeology of magical objects in buildings, how did you come to research this subject?

I had been an amateur archaeologist for a long time before pursuing my history degree and had read Ralph Merrifield 1987 Archaeology of Ritual and Magic. So, when I began specializing in the history of the field it became clear to me that historians were largely unaware of the archaeological evidence for witchcraft. At that point, I was determined to begin a research project on the topic and so that's what I did, leading to where I am today.

'Elf shot'. Flint arrow-head of late Neolithic to early Bronze Age

Arrow: The Portable Antiquities Scheme/ British Museum/CC BY SA 2.0

Suffolk witch-bottle prior to reburial | © Brian Hoggard

What were witch bottles and what was the reasoning behind these?

There are two explanations necessary for witch bottles. There are a number of late 17th-century texts which talk about 'boiling up a witch bottle'. People believed that if you were bewitched there was a part of the witch inside you. These pamphlets recommended that the bewitched person urinate into a bottle (the type of bottle unspecified) and stop it with a bung (cork), then boil it on a fire. The idea was that this would cause excruciating pain to the bladder of the witch or wizard who would then come to your door begging for you to stop the pain. The pamphlets give examples of this working. We do not find these bottles hidden in the walls or under the floors of buildings because that is not how they were used. One of the pamphlets suggests that if the boiling is not successful you should then bury the bottle because 'that would be sure to do the trick'.

The bottles we find concealed in buildings under the floor or within the hearth are different in several ways. Firstly, for the first 150 years or so they are mostly a particular type of bottle formally known as Bartmann stoneware but colloquially known as Bellarmines. These are a type of robust German stoneware with a distinctive anthropomorphic appearance. They have an evil looking face (hence the comparison with the unpopular Cardinal Bellarmine) and a large belly. Remember the bottle type was not specified in the pamphlets. These bottles recovered from buildings usually have a large number of iron pins and nails inside, often deliberately bent, a lock of hair, and urine. There are often other sharp or prickly things inside the bottle. It would appear that the way this was thought to work is that any supernatural force seeking you out would be decoyed or fooled by the anthropomorphic device which smells like you and has your hair inside it. They would attack it instead of you and then become impaled or trapped on the deliberately 'killed' pins and nails within.

Concealed shoes seem a very peculiar method of diverting the attention of evil spirits. What was the reason for this and how is it related to carved shoe prints, or sole prints?

Concealed shoes are the most common of all the magical house protection methods. Usually, shoes are found singly and well-worn, but they can be found in huge hoards too. This would seem to have its origins in the early 14th century when John Schorne, an unofficial English Saint, was around. He is reputed to have cast the Devil into a boot and when he died, pilgrimages to his shrine were incredibly popular, being second in popularity only to the shrine of Thomas-a-Becket at Canterbury. His pilgrim badge shows a Devil stuck in a boot and this image was distributed incredibly widely in paintings in churches as well as via the badges worn by his pilgrims. Whether his legend records an existing belief about the power of footwear to protect against evil or whether he is the origin of the idea, it is without question that his popularity distributed the belief far and wide.

Sometimes solitary child's shoes are discovered in buildings in relatively good condition – often this is related to infant mortality rather than magical house protection.

Dried cats and horse skulls were considered foundation sacrifices. What was the belief behind this practice?

Dried cats appear to have been concealed in buildings in an attempt to provide the building with a little guardian spirit. Cats are semi-nocturnal, slightly mysterious, little hunters who keep our buildings safe from pests; It was believed they could continue this role in a spirit form to act as a guardian for the home. There could also be an element of foundation sacrifice in this practice, appeasing the spirit of the place, but it is more common for foundation sacrifices to be found specifically in the foundations, which is not the case for dried cats, which can be found anywhere in a building.

Dried cats appear to have been concealed in buildings in an attempt to provide it with a little guardian spirit

Horse skulls are more commonly found beneath the floor, quite close to the foundations. They, again, have an element of foundation sacrifice about them but there is more to them than that. Horse skulls feature in many folk dances in Britain where they are clearly thought to represent something of a dangerous spirit. A horse skull looks quite fearsome, unlike the gentle appearance of a living horse. I think there was a bit of a grotesque element to their use in buildings – scaring away lesser spirits. There is also their benevolent relationship with humans to consider, and the fact that they can sleep with their eyes open, meaning they are vigilant when we are asleep, just like the cats.

A concoction of magic features in the written charms found in homes – can you tell us more about these?

Written charms are often found in old buildings; Most of my examples are from England and Wales. The written charm itself is the final act of a process that could take many weeks. What would happen is that a house or farm owner would commission a cunning-man or wise-woman to protect their home.

Eckington dried cat | © Brian Hoggard

The practitioner would then visit the property over a series of appointments, performing rituals of protection at all the corners of the property, probably including land boundaries, cellars, basements, and outbuildings. The rituals would culminate with a final ritual which would include the concealing of a charm on the property, sometimes folded in a sheet of lead and inserted into a gap, sometimes sealed into a bottle and hidden somewhere. The charms themselves were usually a powerful invocation to God and Christ to protect the property, the people, and all livestock from wizards and evil, 'amen'. But the charms also normally contain magical symbols from astrology, popular grimoires, and the abracadabra word triangle. You can see in these charms how the cunning-folk would take supernatural power from wherever they could get it.

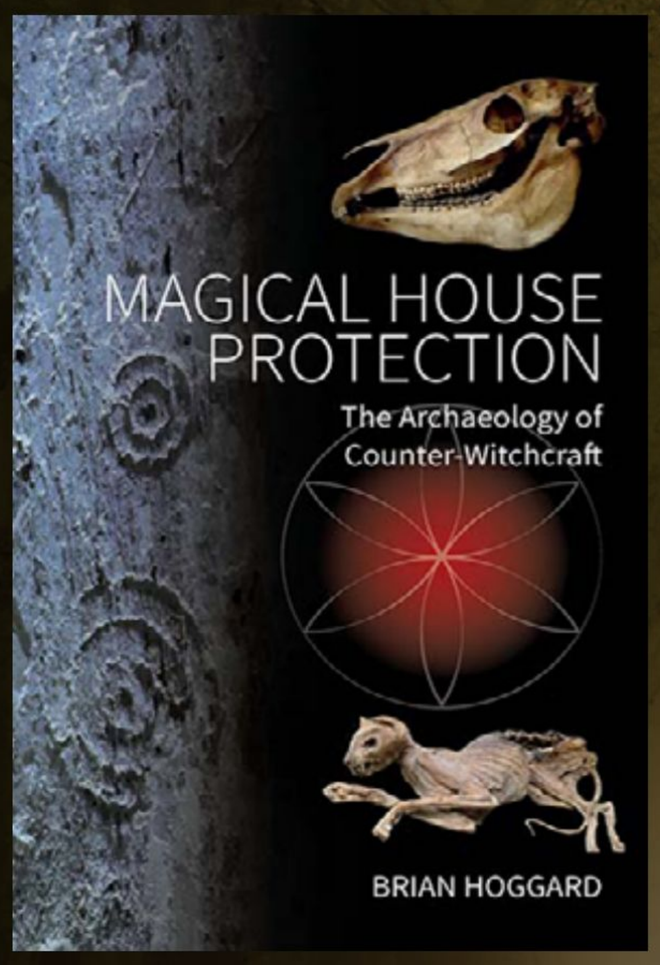
The Daisy Wheel is an ancient solar symbol. How does this and other markings trap spirits or protect against evil?

Concealed shoes are the most common of all the magical house protection methods

Child's shoe discovered in a wall probably put there to protect a child from evil spirits, a practise well known in Lancashire, UK. Dated before 1704 AD

Shoe: The Portable Antiquities Scheme/CC BY 2.0

The first appearances of the Daisy Wheel in the form we currently know it date back to around 1600 BC when we have examples in ancient Egypt. The symbol can be found consistently throughout history from that point throughout most of the world. Around the Mediterranean in particular, with examples in Ancient Greece, Rome, through the Byzantine Empire, and we also find it in Islamic countries, north Africa, India, China, Russia, Scandinavia, early USA – it's everywhere. In the British Isles, it used to be a design that would often be included in Romanesque decoration in Norman buildings on panels and fonts; also this design would feature in Gothic tracery, particularly on church coffers. In Romania, this symbol is commonly understood as an ancient solar symbol and it is also regarded as such in Germany, and was recognized as such in the USA too with its appearance on early gravestones in particular. The idea seems to be that this symbol protects with the light of the sun, so darkness will not or cannot lurk there.



Magical House Protection

By Brian Hoggard

Belief in magic and particularly the power of witchcraft was once a deep and enduring presence in popular culture; people created and concealed many objects to protect themselves from harmful magic. Detailed are the principal forms of magical house protection in Britain and beyond from the 14th century to the present day. Witch-bottles, dried cats, horse skulls, written charms, protection marks and concealed shoes were all used widely as methods of repelling, diverting, or trapping negative energies. Many of these practices and symbols can be found around the globe, demonstrating the universal nature of efforts by people to protect themselves from witchcraft.

Daisy wheel from Ripon Cathedral | © Brian Hoggard

Apotropaic (Witch) marks or the Marian mark, a symbol connected to the Virgin Mary

In many countries, you can find this symbol as an integrated part of decorative motifs but also as graffito, subtly carved onto building surfaces.

Other marks which can be found are what we term 'Marian' marks. They are marks connected with the Virgin Mary. Her initials, V and M, often appear as two Vs overlapping which could mean Virgin of Virgins or as simple Ms. Whether or not the Virgin of Virgins theory (first suggested by Timothy Easton) is correct, the way Ms and Vs are used suggests her initials and, indeed, the current monogram for the Virgin is an amalgam of the letters M and W (or two Vs). The Virgin Mary was the most well-loved of the Christian deities in pre-Reformation England and her protection was sought long after the Reformation passed. This seems to account for these marks appearing as graffitos for such a long time. These marks can often be found lightly scratched (almost invisibly) onto building surfaces in need of protection. Often when we find the M character it has long tapering 'legs' - the exact form of this can be seen in the lines on the palm of your hand. There are some examples of hand outlines on ancient parish church doors that have the M depicted on the palm too.

We do also find marks invoking the presence of Christ, but less often. This is likely because he is so well represented as the focus of modern Christian worship so is already present in symbolism in many places.

The other main type of mark is the

Delusion23/CC BY SA 4.0

Taper burn marks in Haddon Hall, England.

burn mark. This is where someone has deliberately burned the surface of some wood to produce a deep burned area. The depth of many of these marks is such that it can only be achieved by burning, scraping, burning, and scraping again, which experimental archaeology has revealed can take up to 25 minutes. Some places have huge numbers of these marks. My own theory is that where the surface has been burned there is a ghost mark in the shape of a candle on the ethereal plane, shining a light so dark forces will not lurk there. This is an extension of the thinking whereby a cat can continue its role on the ethereal plane, the deliberately bent pins and nails are active on the ethereal plane, and the 'dead' shoe (well worn) can trap evil forces. ■

APOTROPAIOS.CO.UK

Magic Carpets
Fly Through History

|| By Wu Mingren

Magic carpets, made famous by Walt Disney's animated feature film *Aladdin*, are a legendary means of transport that seamlessly whisk their owners across the skies to their destination. While they are most commonly associated with Middle Eastern texts like *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of folktales from ancient Arabia, Africa, Turkey, Greece, Persia, and India, magic carpets have also been mentioned in the writings of different civilizations through history.

In one popular tale authored by 13th century AD Jewish scholar, Isaac Ben Sherira, the Queen of Sheba had a magic carpet made and sent to King Solomon as a token of her love. The court alchemist had discovered that the trick to producing a magic flying carpet lay in the dye, rather than in the weaving process. The carpet sent to King Solomon is said to have been made of green silk, which was embroidered with gold and silver, and studded with precious stones. When the carpet arrived, Solomon was occupied with the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem and passed it on to a courtier. The Queen of Sheba was so heartbroken by the rejection that she abandoned everything to do with magic carpets. Without royal patronage, the alchemist could no longer weave magic carpets, and his knowledge is said to have been lost forever.

In another version of the Solomon fable, God gifted the magic carpet to Solomon. This carpet could carry 40,000 men at any given time. The carpet boosted Solomon's vanity and as punishment God shook it, thus causing the 40,000 men on it to fall to their deaths.

Magic carpets have also been depicted as weapons. In 130 BC, Phraates II, king of the Parthian Empire, is said to have been engaged in a war with Antiochus VII, ruler of the Seleucid Empire. In ancient accounts, Phraates flew from the heights of the Zagros Mountains on a magic carpet to confront his enemy, whom he destroyed with fire and lightning. Phraates was given a triumphant reception when he returned and floated over the heads of his subjects on his magic carpet. ■

The Flying Carpet, a depiction of the hero of Russian folklore, Ivan Tsarevich | Vasnetsov, 1880

Icelandic Sorcerers

Magical Grimoires

Traditions relating to the fascinating practices of witchcraft in Iceland are as old as the first human settlements on the island. Sadly, countless people paid for these practices with their lives, but many sorcerers and witches did not cease their commitment to the magic arts.

The Icelandic word to describe witchcraft is *Seiður*. The men practicing magic were called *seið-menn*, while women were known as *vísendakona*. The concept of the most fundamental seiður was related to the ancient Norse gods like Odin and Freya. Icelandic magic was originally based on Norse beliefs, but with time it started to evolve into a unique and mysterious magic system of its own.

A number of grimoires (textbooks of magic) have been found in collections of Icelandic manuscripts, typically dated to between the 16th and 19th centuries.

Right: A magical stave to ward off witchcraft

The Mystical Spells of the Galdrabok

||By Marina Sohma

Perhaps not as well-known as other Icelandic grimoires, the *Galdrabok* is one of the most important surviving documents for the practices and understanding of occult practices in Iceland in the late Medieval era. It offers a unique insight into the various elements that contributed to a national magical tradition in Iceland at the time of its compilation.

The Galdrabrok was written during the reformation age in Iceland (1550-1650) and was first translated into English by Stephen Flowers in 1989. It is one of the very few translated documents dedicated to this unique manuscript. According to Dr. Flowers, no other document of comparable age gives so many details about the archaic Germanic gods, cosmology, and magical practices, as does this manuscript.

A grimoire displaying the Ægishjálmr symbol, which can be found in the *Galdrabok*.

The *Galdrabok* displays two main graphic features in its spells: runes (or rune-like signs) and *galdramyndir,* which are magical signs that may or may not have runic origins. Although runes were commonly present in Icelandic magical sigils, other encoded runic variations, called *villuletur* or *villurunir,* were also used as a means to confuse or conceal secrets instead of revealing the true meanings.

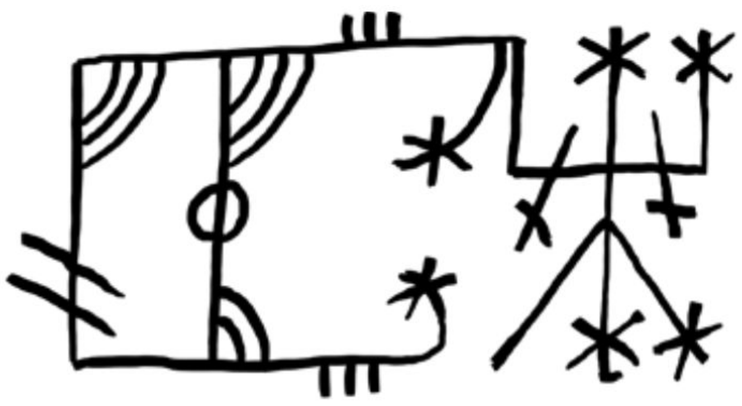
"Another feature apparently inherited from ancient runic magical practice is the very terminology used to describe the figures and ways of using them. Most often the figures are referred to in Icelandic as *stafir,* meaning 'staves'. This is inherited from the old technical designation of runes as staves or sticks because they were often carved on such wood objects for talismanic purposes", as Dr. Flowers described.

A striking feature of the Iceland books of magic is their use of complex magical signs. Most efforts at classifying these signs come from attempting to understand their relationships with the runes and their magical functions. There are three main types of signs used: the *bandrúnir,* or binding runes, which are made up of combinations of runes; *galdrastafir,* or magic staves, which were possibly binding runes but became so stylized that they adopted their own meaning; and *galdramyndir,* or magic signs, which appeared to have always been non-ionic abstract signs.

The manuscript does not represent a comprehensive composition but rather it is a collection of spells that appear to be randomly pieced together. The currently-known version of the *Galdrabok* is known to have been written by four scribes, working over a period of around 100 years.

"The first magician, working in Iceland during the latter half of the 16th century, wrote down spells 1-10. Soon thereafter it was passed on to another Icelander, who added spells 11-39. Perhaps sometime later a third Icelandic scribe came into possession of the book and added spells 40-44. This latter *galdramadhur* wrote in cursive style of the 17th century", related Dr. Flowers. A remarkable detail about this last writer was that he added to the book a rich set of references to the older gods and to Germanic lore.

GALDRABOK



Clockwise from far left: The infamous magical stave, Dreprún, as seen in the Galdrabók, means 'to kill an enemy's cattle'

A rune staff at the Museum of History in Lund, Sweden

Woodcut showing a father teaching his son and a mother teaching her daughter how to use and read rune staffs, 1555

Hedning/CC BY SA 3.0

Not long after the additions of the third scriber to the *Galdrabok*, the work was taken to Denmark, coming into the hands of a Danish magician who added spells beginning with the last section of 44 through 47.

Dr. Flowers added that "in 1682 the book was acquired by the Danish philologist J.G. Sparfvenfelt and was later acquired by the Swedes (sometime between 1689 and 1694) for their great collection of "Gothic" monuments and manuscripts. Eventually, it found its way into the Academy of Science (State Historical Museum) in Stockholm, where it is now".

The *Galdrabok* is essentially composed of two kinds of spells: a group of spells working through a prayer formula, invoking higher powers and by which the magical end is affected indirectly. Only a small number of spells in the *Galdrabok* (eight in total) fall into this category. The second group consists of more commonly used spells which supposedly worked as a direct expression of the magician's will, expressed in forms of signs, written, or spoken formulas. Three of the spells in the *Galdrabok* do not involve either prayers or signs but are more like a recipe, or a potion, using natural substances that were supposed to work with magical effects. This kind of natural magic is often found in "leech-books", or physician's manuals.

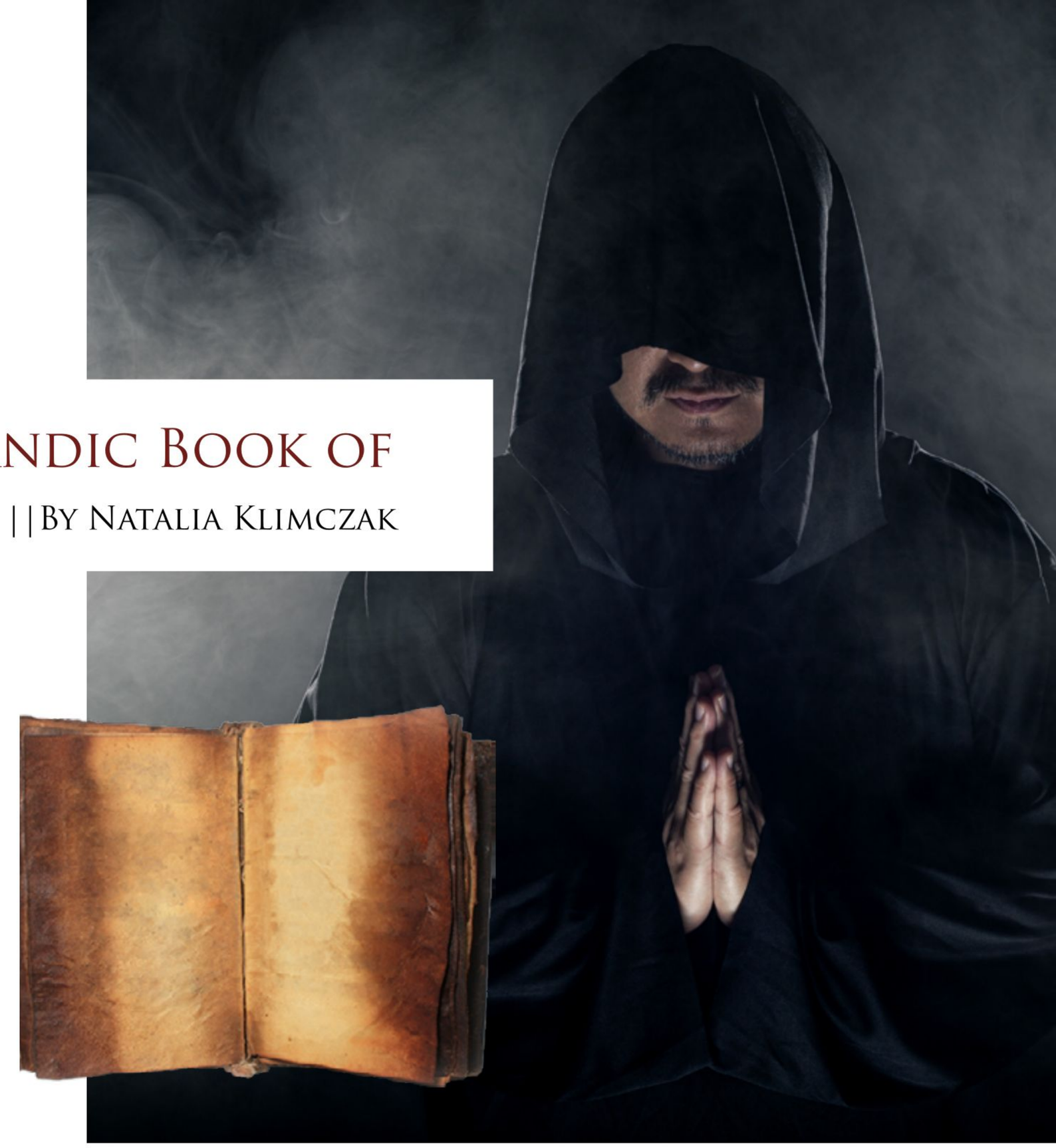
Stephen Flowers took great interest in the religious elements expressed in the spells. "A full twenty-one of the spells have a predominantly non-Christian or overtly heathen (or even diabolical) viewpoint. This is not unexpected, as the whole practice of magic had been associated with the heathen past and with demonic sources from the time of the introduction of Christianity". Despite this fact, there are about nine spells which are purely of Christian outlook, citing Christian figures or using Christian formulas. There are also some spells with Judeo-Gnostic roots.

The *Galdrabok* spells can be roughly placed into six categories of intentions and magical motivation, the most common being protective formulas for the magician or just general spells to bring good fortune. There are also spells devoted to more aggressive forms of magic.

It was in the background of a 'heathen' and Catholic past that the magic contained in the *Galdrabook* was practiced, and it was during this period of religious persecution that the works were finally committed to parchment. ■

The Infamous Icelandic Book of Black Magic

||By Natalia Klimczak



Rauðskinna is a legendary book that was more terrifying than most of the black magic documents ever produced. It was so dark, that most people could not believe it was written by a Christian bishop. Its main objective was to use magic to gain control of Satan himself.

Also known as *The Book of Power, Rauðskinna* ('Red Skin' in Icelandic) took its name from the red cover written in gold-lettered runes. It was a collection of the darkest rules and spells known to have been created by a man who officially worshipped the Christian God. However, it seems that its author, Gottskalk Nikulausson, wanted much more in life than serving his religion.

Gottskalk Nikulausson was born in 1469 in Iceland, and between 1496 and his death on December 8, 1520, he was the Bishop of Holar. He had been born into a Christian family. His uncle, Olaf Rognvaldsson, was a bishop and Gottskalk was his successor. However, as we will see, Gottskalk's actions were far removed from the values he preached about in his official role.

Gottskalk had a mistress whose name was Gurdun, and two children: Odd Gottskalksson, and Gurdun Gottskalksdottir. He also had a lover known as Jonsdottir, with whom he had a daughter named Kristin.

Historical records refer to him as manipulative, ambitious and cruel. He was more interested in his status in life, than carrying out his role as a bishop. Moreover, he started to explore the dark knowledge of ancient witchcraft in its blackest form, and this became his greatest obsession.

Like the authors of the *Books of Shadow* were dedicated to witchcraft, Gottskalk was passionate about magic and committed many years to the task of writing *Rauðskinna*. The main goal of the book was to create and master such strong magic to have control over Satan. He wanted to make Satan his slave and to rule the world.

At the time of his death, Gottskalk was known as a very dangerous and powerful person, who knew black magic better than any person who lived in Iceland at the time. When he died during the winter of 1520, *Rauðskinna* was buried with him, locking away its dark secrets forever.

Gottskalk's story is related to another one – about Loftur, a man who was seeking the same powers.

Two centuries after the death of Gottskalk, Loftur arrived at the cathedral school in Holar, where Gottskalk had been a bishop, and studied magic.

When he mastered the book known as *Graskinna* ('Grey Skin'), also with black magic spells, he knew enough magic to create mischief among the town's people. However, once he became bored with this, he began seeking the same dark knowledge that had attracted Gottskalk. One day he asked another student to help him raise all the bishops of Holar, who were buried in the cathedral, from the dead. When the student refused, Loftur killed him.

According to legend, Loftur eventually fell victim to the magic and power he so desired. He was walking around the church and chanting spells to summon Gottskalk and get his book, the *Rauðskinna*. According to the folklore story retold by Shaun D. L. Brassfield-Thorpe:

"Despite all this, Gottskalk still did not come from his grave - so Loftur started chanting as never before. He turned the words of the Psalms into praises for the Devil and made a sorry confession of all his good deeds. The three crowned dead bishops kept as far away as possible from Loftur and faced him with their hands raised - the other dead bishops looked at them and kept their gaze away from Loftur. At last, a heavy sound was heard, and a dead man arose bearing a staff in his left hand and a red book under his right arm. He did not wear a crucifix on his chest, and he looked unkindly at the other dead bishops. He gazed at Loftur, who chanted all the more during this. Gottskalk moved a little closer to Loftur and said scornfully: 'You chant well, my son, and better than I would have expected. But you will not get my *Rauðskinna*.'

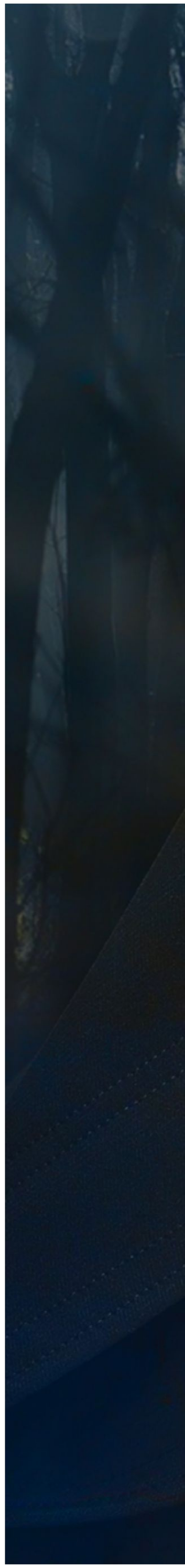
He changed The Blessing and The Lord's Prayer into praises for the Devil, and the church shook like a straw in the wind

Loftur then seemed to turn himself inside out and chanted in a way he had never done before. He changed The Blessing and The Lord's Prayer into praises for the Devil, and the church shook like a straw in the wind. The student, watching in the belfry, thought he saw Gottskalk move again closer to Loftur and he seemed to thrust a corner of the book towards the magician. He had been frightened all this time but now he shook with his terror. He thought he saw the bishop lift the book and Loftur stretch out his hand. So, he pulled the bell-rope as hard as he could and everything that had appeared vanished into the floor with a whispering sound."

According to legend, Loftur died soon later and was taken by the devil in the boat of the underworld. He had never become as powerful as Gottskalk.

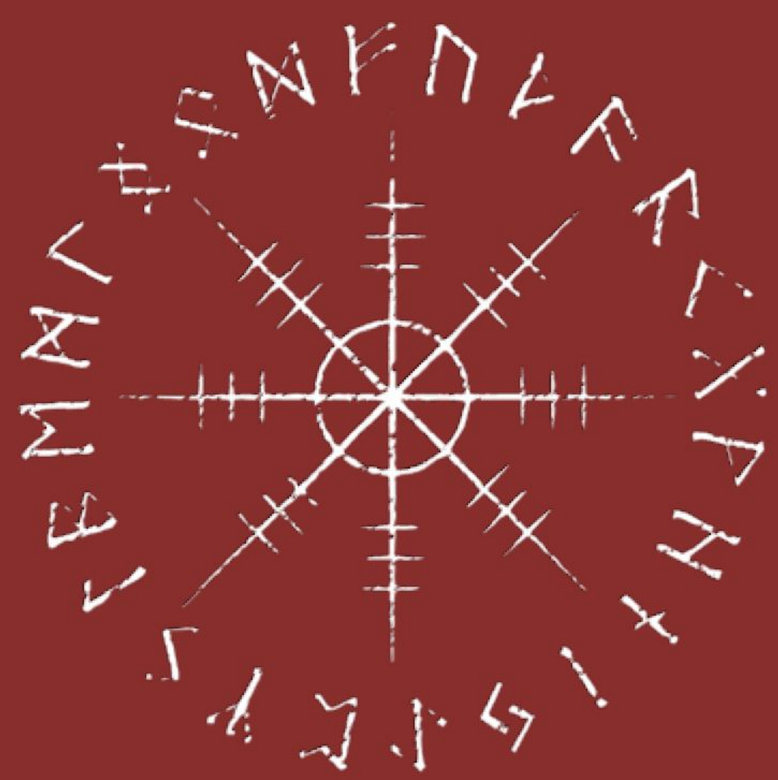
So, what happened to the grave of the cruel bishop and his infamous book of power buried with him? Some say that it was destroyed in secret, while others believe that it still remains in Iceland, continuing to hide his dark book of magic.

The story of the bishop, who became a master of black magic, has remained a well-known story in Iceland, passed down through the generations. But it is one which is rarely commented on by the Catholic Church. ■



RAUDSKINNA

At last, a heavy sound was heard, and a dead man arose bearing a staff in his left hand and a red book under his right arm



The Christianization of Iceland took place around 999 AD, but the new religion wasn't accepted easily. The Icelandic people wanted to follow their old beliefs, so the process of adaptation was long and full of resistance. Laws created by Norway and Denmark relating to witchcraft were applied in Iceland in 1630. Unlike other parts of Europe, most of those persecuted for magic in Iceland were men, as there was a strong tradition of male magic. The first man to be executed for practicing magic, Jón Rögnvaldsson, lived during the end of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century. Many more followed.

NECROPANTS

Magical Powers of Dead Man Trousers

ll By Mark Oliver

A museum in Iceland is home to the only known pair of necropants: that is, pants made out of human skin!

Legend has it that Icelandic sorcerers would tear the skin off of a dead friend's body and clothe themselves in their flesh. They called them *nábrók,* or necropants - a type of dark magic that was supposed to bring the wearer unlimited wealth.

The legend of necropants was passed down orally for generations before anyone wrote it down. It took until the mid-19th century before an Icelandic Folklorist, Jón Árnason wrote the ritual down in graphic detail:

"A man who wants to have such breeches must make an agreement with someone still alive that as soon as the latter dies, he can have the use of his skin. As soon as this happens, the survivor goes to the churchyard by night and digs the dead man up. He then flays the skin off from the waist down and slips it off in one piece, for he must take care that there is no hole in the breeches."

When a sorcerer put on the flayed skin from his friend's legs, it would latch onto his flesh. Only one small flap of flesh would remain loose: a small pocket at the wearer's scrotum from where he would be able to reach his hand in and pull out as much wealth as he wanted.

The necropants seen in pictures are the ones on display in the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, which boasts that it has the only known pair of human-flesh pants in the world. Even those pants, though, are fake; a replica made by a local artist named Árni Páll Jóhannsson. While no real pair of necropants has ever been found, the story clearly came from somewhere! That somewhere is Papey Island, a small island off the eastern coast of Iceland. The people of Papey Island didn't just believe that necropants were real; they insisted that they knew a man who owned a pair – an 18th-century Papey Islander named Mensalder Jonsson.

Mensalder Jonsson allegedly amassed a fortune after putting on the flesh of a dead friend. He'd sworn that he would peel the necropants off when he had all that he needed and beg for God's forgiveness of his immortal soul.

The necropants, though, had a strange effect on his mind. The longer he wore them, the more his mind decayed. Mensalder became desperately attached to his pants of human skin, refusing to ever take them off. While he was outside walking one day, a great storm roared up and lifted Mensalder up into the air.

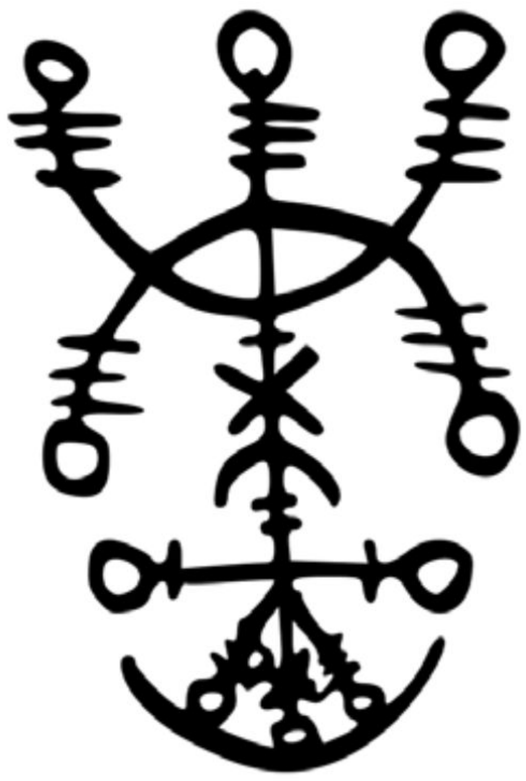
Jennifer Boyer/CC BY ND 2.0

Left: A replica of a pair of nábrók at The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery & Witchcraft. At the right is the magical symbol that is part of the ritual and at its feet are coins

He was pulled out of sight and vanished, never to be seen again.

Mensalder Jonsson was a real person. Records of his actual life say that he died in his home in 1799, with none of the dramatic divine wrath that 'brightens up' the story, and no mention of any pants made of skin latched onto his thighs.

It's likely that the stories of Mensalder Jonsson's witchcraft were spread by jealous neighbors who couldn't understand how he'd earned his fortune. Or, it might just be a real tradition passed down through the centuries; a glimpse into the dead beliefs of a pagan world lost to time. ■

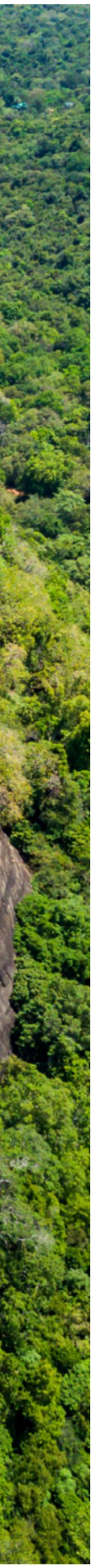


Above: An Icelandic magical stave, Nábrókarstafur, for Necropants

Tibetan Prayer Flags

Tibetan prayer flags are colorful rectangular cloths strung along trails and peaks high in the Himalayas and used to bless the surrounding countryside. Gautama Buddha's prayers were written on battle flags and the Indian monk Atisha (980–1054 AD) introduced the Indian practice of printing prayers on cloth flags to Tibet and Nepal. Traditionally, prayer flags come in sets of five: one in each of five colors, arranged from left to right in a specific order: blue (sky and space), white (air and wind), red (fire), green (water), and yellow (earth). The five colors not only represent the five elements but also the Five Pure Lights. According to traditional Tibetan medicine, health and harmony are produced through the balance of the five elements.

 Dmitry Rukhlenko |AdobeStock



Sri Lanka

Impressions on the Island of Ancient Secrets

|| By Freddie Levy

My entire body was jerked to one side. As the airplane banked to the left with the pilot preparing for landing, a large, vibrantly green landmass took up the entire view through my cabin window. The sight of boundless canopies and deep, rolling valleys made me conscious of how little I actually knew about the real Sri Lanka, thousands of feet below.

Located approximately 870 miles to the east of the southernmost tip of India, with a landmass of 25,332 miles², the one thing I unfortunately did know about this tropical paradise is that it's been witness to countless tragedies in recent times. A sporadic civil war, which was sparked in 1983 due to a flashpoint in political tensions, stayed ignited until the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam forces were defeated by government troops in 2009. In 2004, the Boxing Day Tsunami ravaged the island, claiming the lives of over 35,000 people. More recently, the appalling 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings throughout the island caused mass devastation and unrest. These are terrible, unforgettable events, and should be treated as such.

However, these incidents by no means imply that the island's long-forgotten history should be cast-aside. Through a little digging, it soon becomes clear that the island houses a far richer history than many have been led to believe. Could these clues, left dormant on this largely unknown island, help us to unravel our own forgotten ancient past?

There is not much history written about Sri Lanka before the Common Era, yet the bountiful island boasts significant prehistoric sites, nestled away, far beyond the well-worn paths and bustling beach-side resorts.

Fa Hien cave (also known as Pahiyangala cave) is found deep in the densely packed jungles that flourish throughout the western Kalutara province. Radio-carbon testing has dated it to have been inhabited for at least 28,000 years. Similarly, in Batadombalena cave, located within the unforgiving and mountainous Sudagala region, along with Belilina cave situated within Kitulgala the wettest region on the island, some of the oldest anatomically correct *Homo sapiens* skeletal remains were found within Southern Asia. Known as "Balangoda Man" (or *Homo sapiens balangodensis*), these were unearthed by archaeologists in the 1960s and '70s. They date to the Upper Pleistocene— an epoch broadly ranging from 129,000 to 11,700 years ago.

Undoubtedly, there has been human settlement in Sri Lanka for tens, maybe even hundreds of thousands of years yet, despite this, so few, or close to no written records, even for the past thousand or so years, exist to this day. Instead, what we know about ancient human existence in Sri Lanka appears through the testing of skeletal remains such as those found in the caves mentioned above, or through the discovery of stone tools, dug up and dated to give an estimation of when human activity began to take root on the island.

The question is, how are these tests conducted and how accurate are they? Tests are conducted using radiocarbon dating. In a nutshell, this is when archaeologists remove small pieces of organic material from a site, subject it to a "mass spectrometer" (a device capable of counting the carbon-14 atoms present in the material), which then provides an age for the tested material and thus, by association, determine the age of the site in general where the material was found.

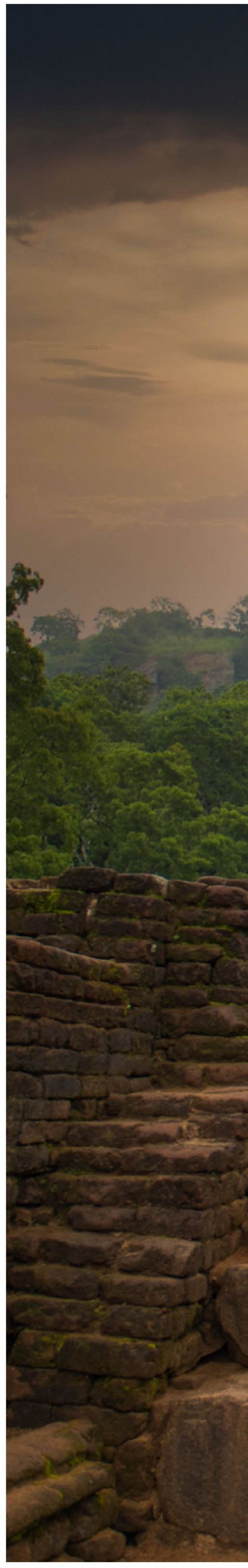
The view from below, where the Fa Hien cave is situated and the earliest remnants of human survived, maybe even thrived, in prehistoric Sri Lanka

While favored as an accurate method for many decades, Sturt Manning, a Professor of Archaeology at Cornell University, believes that factors like the fluctuating carbon-cycle may affect the results and "potentially undermine several current archaeological and historical positions and controversies". Although Manning was referencing his work in the Southern Levant region, not Sri Lanka, Dr. Alan Zindler, a Professor of Geology working at Columbia University, expands and notes that "carbon-dating is unreliable for objects older than 30,000 years", suggesting Manning's criticism may hereto apply to almost every pre-Upper-Pleistocene site that has been radiocarbon dated—exactly the period attributed to early Sri Lankan man.

Thus, radiocarbon dating can provide a solid basis when determining estimations for objects belonging to a more recent time, however, cracks creep into the foundations the further back into our ancient past we push. Accordingly, we must always be aware of the possibility that these sites, in this case on the mysterious island of Sri Lanka, and their dated remains, may be much older than we are first led to believe.

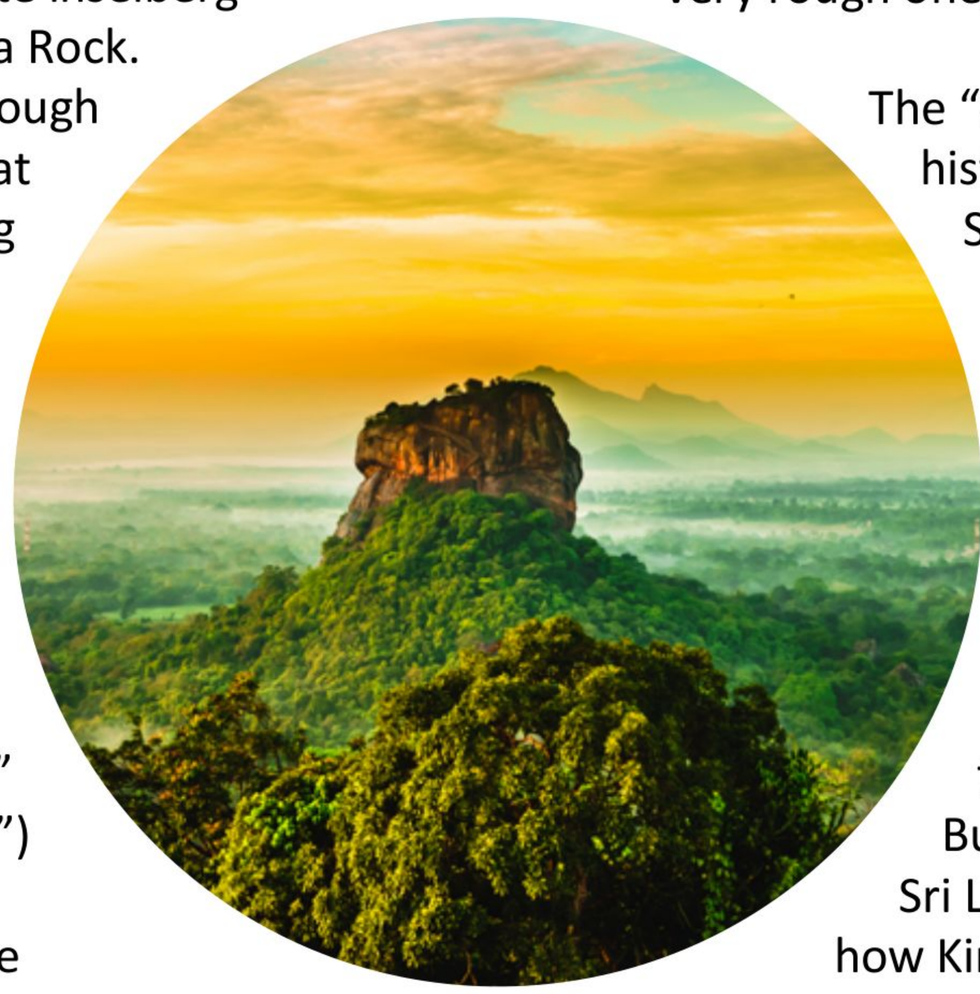
SIGIRIYA, THE LION ROCK

Zooming down the narrow, treacherous, pot-holed Sri Lankan roads, I noticed the roads were empty and the welcoming roadside residents of Sigiriya village seemed to be all sound asleep. As they should—it was not even 04:45 in the morning. Despite this ridiculous hour, I had risen to the croaking of the frogs, wiped the sleep from my eyes and was currently giving my best effort not to end up headfirst into one of the countless ditches littering the path. We were looking for a certain large rock to climb up, in the hopes of observing a giant, sleeping lion.



"Silence spread, all mutually respecting the eerie, palpable atmosphere enveloping the scene unfolding before us."

About an hour or so later, with an electrified atmosphere, I was, along with maybe 20 others, gathered on a towering rock-summit. Silence spread, all mutually respecting the eerie, palpable atmosphere enveloping the scene unfolding before us. We were perched 65 feet up on a granite inselberg known as Pidurangala Rock. The mountainous, though motionless, "lion" that we were all observing was, of course, the neighboring Sigiriya Rock. Granted the status of a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, we were all gathered to watch the "*suryoday*" (Sanskrit for "sunrise") over the enchanting "eighth wonder of the world".



As the sun began to finally break through the cloud cover, I took note of how it suspended motionless in the sky for a few spectacular moments, almost seeming to deliberately linger directly in front of Sigiriya ("the lion rock"). This was interesting for a few reasons. First off, the view was absolutely breathtaking - that was definitely an added bonus and the reason why we had spent the last half an hour breathlessly clambering up Pidurangala's mini-mountain summit in pitch darkness.

Secondly, the fact that I had been re-reading at the time a book authored by Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval, the concept of a sky-ground connection was fresh in my mind. Hancock and Bauval focus on the alignment of certain ancient monuments in Egypt with the sun and other celestial objects, namely various star systems. As I was standing on the neighboring summit, observing the sun now slowly rising over Sigiriya, the words of Hancock and Bauval echoed in my mind, and a theory, admittedly a very rough one, began to form.

The "*Culavamsa*", a historical record of Sri Lanka dating back to the fourth century BC, first records Sigiriya's initial occupation. Written in "*Pali*" (a language apparently chosen to record the teachings of Buddha in ancient Sri Lanka), it details how King Kashyapa I of Anuradhapura, one of the island's ancient capitals, killed his father during a political coup and was forced to flee, proceeding to build his palace and battlements atop Sigiriya, a place famed to be "difficult of ascent for human beings". It is not hard to understand why human ascension is so difficult: the rock formation soars vertically, standing at its pinnacle over 590 feet from the densely vegetated floor. It is thus no wonder Kashyapa fled to this natural, impregnable fortress.

Upon arrival, it is assumed Kashyapa began construction of a fortress-come-pleasure-palace, aimed to defend against any retaliation from his disposed brother, Moggallana, the rightful heir to the Anuradhapurian throne, whilst of course, living the high life as king in the meantime.

Left: Sunrise view of Sigiriya from Pidurangala Rock

The ancient ruins of Sigiriya in Sri Lanka. (Far Left and above) The Lion staircase; (Below) A pool at the Upper Palace of Sigiriya; (Left) A Macaque monkey enjoys the view

The *Culavamsa* is one of the very rare ancient sources of information linking Kashyapa and Sigiriya. As mentioned earlier, there is not much "official" history at all when it comes to ancient Sri Lanka. There is, however, ancient myth.

Since the works of the 20th-century mythologist Joseph Campbell, along with the paradigm-shifting analysis by academics Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (1969), it has become widely known that myth is not simply fantastical tales conjured up by ancient, overactive imaginations, but is instead a powerful and rather significant part of real human history.

If there were, in fact, great civilizations flourishing in Sri Lanka way before the time of Kashyapa, capable of creating marvels like the Sigiriya complex, would they have in some way featured in the same foundation myths as other civilizations, whose own genesis are now also being brought into question?

One key recurring theme throughout world myth is that of a great flood. Discussing exactly this in his collective work "*Underworld*", Graham Hancock notes how the "*Rajavali*", part of the Ceylonese chronicles based on archaic oral sources, describe how large parts of Sri Lanka were once destroyed by massive flooding, where large cities, settlements and over "20 miles of the coast, extending inland [were] washed away". We only have to think back to the 2004 tragedy to get a sense of how destructive the forces of water can be on the island.

While many would have dismissed this as mere fantasy, Hancock pushed on. He discovered "that a large tract of land would indeed have been exposed between Tuticorin [India] and Mannar [North Sri Lanka] – just as the chronicle said – at around 16,000 years ago", positing that "Sri Lanka was indeed much larger than it is today with the greatest extent of antediluvian land… exactly where, 'in a former age' a giant citadel once stood." Ergo, ancient, lost and wholly unknown civilizations once extended over Sri Lanka, spanning from the Indian subcontinent.

It begins to seem far more likely that Kashyapa, after committing the act of patricide, seeking an immediate safe-haven, fled to Sigiriya, a place where an already-existing, prehistoric, and easily

Above: Panorama of the Upper Palace of Sigiriya

defendable outcrop lay ready for the newly disposed king to put his vast resources to work. We know that the area immediately surrounding the Sigiriya complex has been inhabited since the third millennium BC. This gives ample time for a proper settlement to be established long before Kashyapa appeared on the scene.

Additionally, a 2002 study into the irrigation systems surrounding Sigiriya, attributed to the king, concluded that the "basin was quickly abandoned" and "never in use for any appreciable length of time." This not only highlights the small length of time Kashyapa was present at the site, but also it begs the question, could he really have gone to all of the extreme lengths that are now becoming evident, in order to create the features of the complex citadel in this small window of time?

Sigiriya maiden with fruits. 5th century fresco at the ancient rock fortress of Sigiriya

I propose that Kashyapa simply "re-inherited" Sigiriya for his own purposes and was not, in fact, the original architect of the enigmatic settlement.

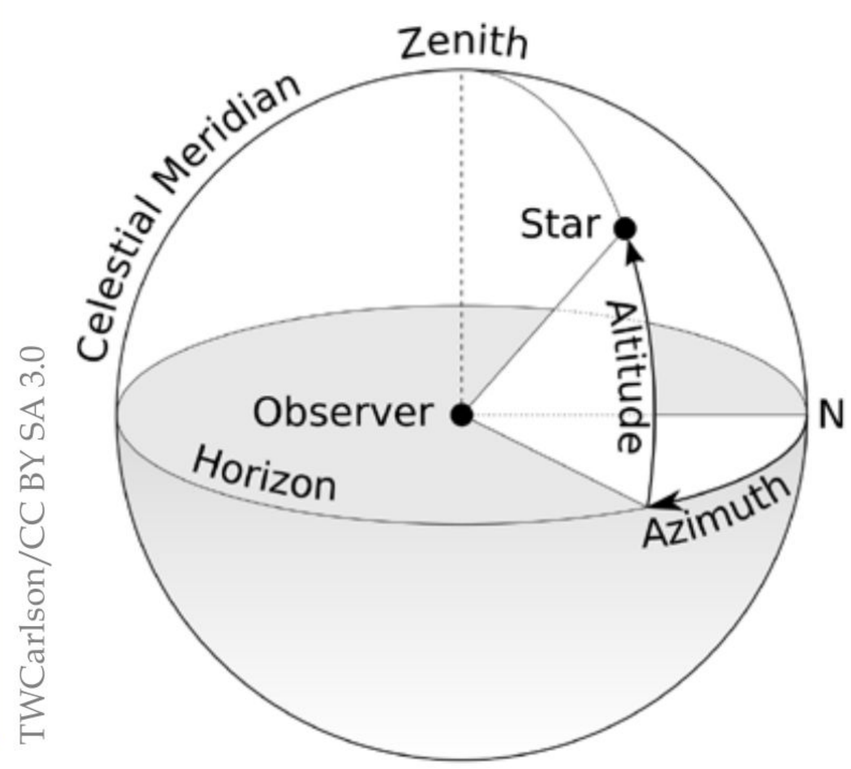
Another question begs exploration: Could the Sigiriya sky-ground connection point to more clues to unravel the forgotten past?

Many researchers believe that there was an ancient, lost, and largely unknown civilization once present here on Earth. This should probably come as no surprise to any reader who doesn't subscribe to the mainstream academic view on human prehistory. One unique trait was to create, or at least facilitate the creation of, astronomically aligned megalithic structures, the purposes of which are still largely unknown and hotly debated to this day.

Could this same strand of lost civilization, or at least the influences of it, have been present in prehistoric Sri Lanka? I first thought about this in the official Sigiriya Museum, looking at a scaled-down diagram of the Sigiriya complex. It showed in great detail the layout of the various sites around the rock, and what the archaeological remains may have once looked like on top of the rocky citadel itself.

In the corner of the display case, I curiously noticed a small compass, thoughtfully put there to allow the visitor a sense of orientation with the site. What struck me specifically was the apparent orientation that the site had to the east, exactly the same direction I had been facing while perched on top of Pidurangala rock, watching

Many researchers believe that there was an ancient, lost, and largely unknown civilization once present here on Earth



TWCarlson/CC BY SA 3.0

the sun rise over the citadel earlier that same day.

To say the complex is aligned along a true east-west axis would be false; it is actually inclined by 9°. According to Italian researcher Amelia Sparavigna in her 2013 article, in the *International Journal of Sciences*, this off-set suggests a deliberate alignment with a specific azimuth of the sun. Her paper concluded: "… the Sigiriya Complex was planned with respect of an axis oriented with the sunset of the zenithal sun, that is, oriented with the sunset of a day when the sun reaches the zenith".

An azimuth is an astronomical measurement that, when combined with elevation, helps to work out and define the position of a certain celestial body (e.g. the sun, moon, star or planet) as observed at a certain time of day, from a particular location on Earth. Quite clearly there must be some advanced astronomical knowledge behind this alignment.

I find this deliberate alignment captivating, especially when I learned from the work of the 20th-century American astronomer Lincoln LaPaz how azimuths are one component, alongside the object's estimated altitude, needed to accurately evaluate where a comet has appeared and exited from in the sky—essential when tracking meteor showers periodically throughout the year.

What I propose is, (with Sparavigna ascertaining that Sigiriya was aligned to less than 1° accuracy with the sun when it reached its highest altitude between April 9 and September 1), the complex may have functioned as a "meteor shower observatory" of sorts.

Lion Rock staircase leading up to the summit of Sigiriya Rock

We have a confirmed azimuth angle already built into the Sigiriya complex. Theoretically, one would only need to stand on the citadel itself, high up above the surrounding terrain, commanding a clear view of the sky, to then begin work estimating the altitude of said object to calculate its trajectory.

Humoring this theory, what meteor showers could these ancient builders have been trying to track? Well, specifically the Lyrids, Eta Aquariids, and Perseids fall within the time frame provided by Sparavigna's research and are all known to have historically had large, potentially hazardous, comet fragments pass through them during Earth's annual cross-over their orbit. Consequently, I speculate that the alignment of the Sigiriya complex may, in fact, have been used to observe one of these three major meteor streams.

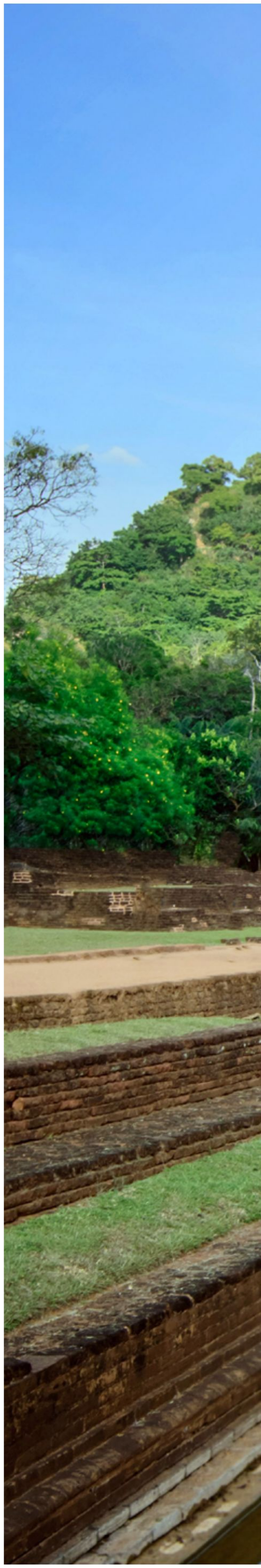
The frequently forgotten island of Sri Lanka, overshadowed by the cultural colossi India, has many more secrets to discover than people understand

Admittedly, the evidence for a sky-ground connection in Sri Lankan monuments had, for a long time, been shaky at best. Now, through dedicated researchers like Sparavigna and Vladimir Kovalsky, a better understanding of how the Sigiriya complex (as well as other surrounding Sri Lankan sites) has been deliberately aligned to the cosmos, is most certainly appearing through the haze.

Whatever one may believe, I stand firmly by the notion that the frequently forgotten island of Sri Lanka, overshadowed by the cultural colossi India, has many more secrets to discover than people understand, or even give it credit for today.

The notion that there has been definite inhabitance of the island for possibly hundreds of thousands of years, especially when coupled with the faulty method of radiocarbon dating, is an intriguing one. We not only have evidence for advanced archaeoastronomy that could possibly hint to cataclysmic comet-watching, but we also have flood myths that link Sigiriya, moreover Sri Lanka in general, to other ancient civilizations around the world.

These connections are now, more than ever, starting to emerge, and the amazing and misunderstood sites like Sigiriya, almost deliberately dotted throughout the tropical paradise, should warrant further investigation. ■



Ancient gardens and pools at the base of Sigiriya Rock, Sri Lanka

ALICIA MCDERMOTT

Alicia is a researcher, editor, and writer with Ancient Origins. She's a lifelong learner and has worked in education, tourism, and anthropology. Traveling throughout Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, Alicia has increased her knowledge of Pre-Colombian sites as well as life in modern Andean cultures.

9 Herbs Charm: Medieval Magic From the Garden

The '*Lacnunga*,' often translated as 'Remedies,' is a manuscript with Medieval theories on disease, healing, and some 200 treatments using medicinal plants and other materials as well as prayers and invocations. It dates to the 10th-11th century and gained its name from a 19th-century editor, but some of the material covered in this work comes from earlier times. The text is primarily Old English and Latin, but it also includes material in Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Old Irish.

The most famous of the medical prescriptions found in the '*Lacnunga*' is the Nine Herbs Prayer, also known as the Nine Herbs Charm and the Nine Wort Charm, which seems to follow a holistic health care perspective – the unknown author of the text obviously saw the importance of caring for both a patient's physical and psychological needs.

This remedy was considered pretty powerful healing magic for its time and when you read the poem that would have been chanted while the treatment was prepared, you'll likely recognize there's meant to be a sacred feeling to the poetic words. For example, you see in the text a reference to Pagan and possibly Christian beliefs. Another interesting aspect of the incantation is the repeated mention of the number three – a meaningful number in Pagan beliefs and witchcraft. The practitioner would have carefully combined the chosen incantation with the nine herbs that were specifically selected to promote healing.

The medicinal herbs used in the Nine Herbs Charm are believed to be: mugwort, betony (or possibly cockspur), nettle, plantain, thyme, fennel, crabapple, lamb's cress (or watercress), and chamomile. These plants would have been ground into a powder and then mixed with boiled water, soap, and ash to make a salve that could be applied to wounds, inflamed skin, or an infection. It's interesting to note that some of the plants that are used in the charm have also been recognized in modern pharmacology to have therapeutic qualities.

The Nine Herbs Prayer was repeated by the health care practitioner throughout preparation and application of the salve, which may have been a way not only of imbuing the herbs with more power and encouragement– they are spoken to as if they are sentient – but perhaps also to ensure the process took the right amount of time when grinding, simmering, and mixing the concoction. ■

The Nine Herbs Prayer

Remember, Mugwort, what
you made known,
what you arranged at
Regenmeld.
You were called Una, the
oldest of herbs,
you have power against
three and against thirty,
you have power against
poison and against infection,
you have power against
the loathsome foe roving
through the land.

And you, waybread, mother
of herbs, open from the east,
mighty inside.
Over you chariots creaked,
over you queens rode,
over you brides cried out,
over you bulls snorted.
You withstood all of them,
you dashed against them.
May you likewise withstand
poison and infection
and the loathsome foe
roving through the land.

'Stune' is the name of this
herb, it grew on a stone,
it stands up against poison, it
dashes against poison,
it drives out the hostile one,
it casts out poison.
This is the herb that fought
against the snake,
it has power against
poison, it has power against
infection,
it has power against the
loathsome foe roving
through the land.
Now, atterlothe, put to flight
now, Venom-loather, the
greater poisons,
though you are the lesser,
you the mightier, conquer
the lesser poisons, until he
is cured of both. [...]

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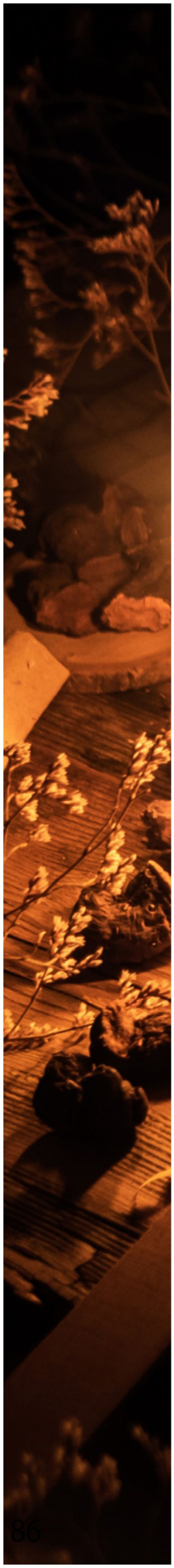


Remember, maythe, what you made known,
what you accomplished at Alorford,
that never a man should lose his life from infection
after maythe was prepared for his food.
This is the herb that is called 'Wergulu'.
A seal sent it across the sea-right,
a vexation to poison, a help to others.
It stands against pain, it dashes against poison,
it has power against three and against thirty,
against the hand of a fiend and against mighty devices,
against the spell of mean creatures.

There the Apple accomplished it against poison
that she [the loathsome serpent] would never dwell in the house.
Chervil and Fennel, two very mighty one.
They were created by the wise Lord,
holy in heaven as He hung;
He set and sent them to the seven worlds,
to the wretched and the fortunate, as a help to all.

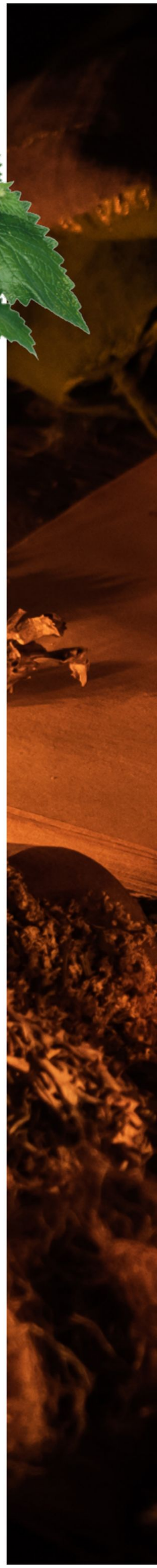
These nine have power against nine poisons.
A worm came crawling, it killed nothing.
For Woden took nine glory-twigs,
he smote the adder that it flew apart into nine parts.

Now these nine herbs have power against nine evil spirits,
against nine poisons and against nine infections:
Against the red poison, against the foul poison.
against the yellow poison, against the green poison,
against the black poison, against the blue poison,
against the brown poison, against the crimson poison.
Against worm-blister, against water-blister,
against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister,
against ice-blister, against poison-blister.
Against harmfulness of the air, against harmfulness of the ground,
against harmfulness of the sea.
If any poison comes flying from the east,
or any from the north, [or any from the south,]
or any from the west among the people.

Woden stood over diseases of every kind.
I alone know a running stream,
and the nine adders beware of it.
May all the weeds spring up as herbs from their roots,
the seas slip apart, all salt water,
when I blow this poison from you.

Mugwort, waybread open from the east, lamb's cress, atterlothe, maythe, nettle, crab-apple, chervil and fennel, old soap; pound the herbs to a powder, mix them with the soap and the juice of the apple. Then prepare a paste of water and of ashes, take fennel, boil it with the paste and wash it with a beaten egg when you apply the salve, both before and after.

Sing this charm three times on each of the herbs before you prepare them, and likewise on the apple. And sing the same charm into the mouth of the man and into both his ears, and on the wound, before you apply the salve.



9 Magical Herbs

una

Mugwart

Artemisia vulgaris: It has been used as an infusion to treat gastritis, digestive problems, and menstrual disorders.

waybread

Plantain

Plantago major: Crushed leaves are cooling and pain-relieving and can be applied in poultice or creams to treat wounds and abrasions. As an infusion it was used as a gargle or eyebath.

stune

Lamb's cress

Cardamine hirsuta: As a tea, has been used as a cough remedy. Crushed leaves have been used as a poultice for rheumatism and gout.

atterlothe

Betony

Betonica officinalis: Antibacterial, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory. As a tea, it helps with throat and mouth irritation and to treat diarrhea. As a tincture it has been used to treat anxiety and headaches.

maythe

Chamomile

Matricaria chamomilla: The tea is a mild sedative and can reduce inflammation and soothe teething pains.

wergulu

Nettle

Utrica dioica: A mature leaf tea serves as a laxative and expectorant.

Crab Apple

Pyrus malus: An antiseptic, antifungal, and tonic. It reduces skin inflammation and helps remove dead skin fragments.

Chervil

Anthriscus cerefolium: Bruised leaves have been applied as poultices to wounds. Chervil tea helps digestion and stimulates perspiration.

Fennel

Foeniculum vulgare: Fennel tea helps with indigestion and colic.

A Modern Take on the Nine Herbs Charm

Gather equal parts (1/2- 1 tablespoon) of dried betony, chamomile, crabapple, fennel, mugwort, nettle, plantain leaves, thyme, and watercress. You'll also need: 1 cup coconut oil, 1 – 2 oz shaved beeswax, and cheesecloth.

Blend all the herbs together to make a fine powder. Combine this with oil in the top of a double boiler pot. When the water boils, reduce the heat to simmer the water and let the herbs infuse into the coconut oil for about an hour.

Use the cheesecloth to carefully strain the herb-infused oil into a bowl. Put the beeswax in a pan on the stove at very low heat and slowly pour the oil over the wax to melt it.

Put the melted mix into a heat-proof jar and put it in the fridge to firm up a little, this may take about half an hour.

Enjoy the magic healing salve!

Note: This recipe is for informational purposes only and is not meant to substitute for medical advice.

How did the Greek gods and goddesses come to be?
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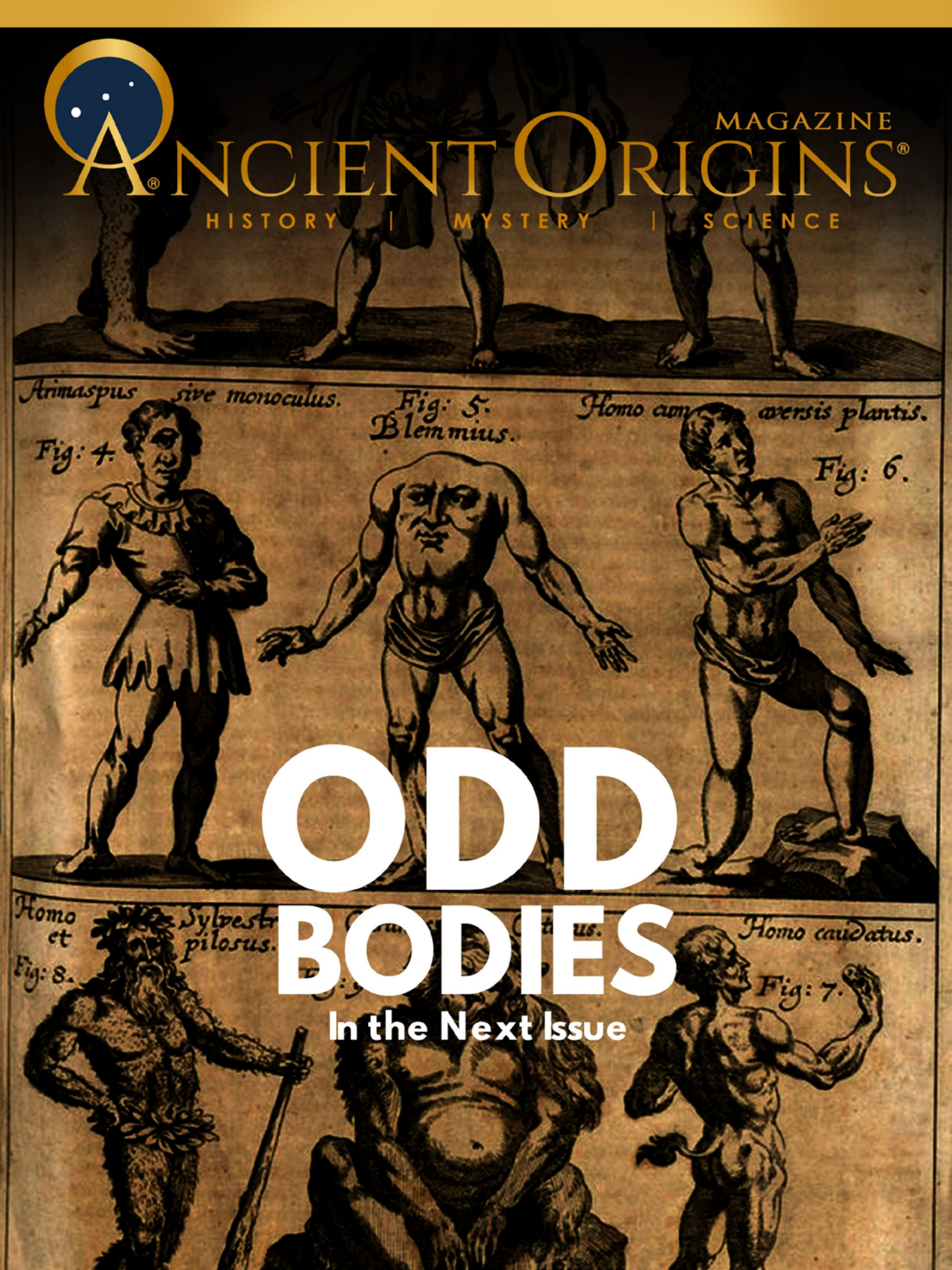

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